Designated Sitter

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Designated Sitter

by TigerPrawn

Summary

Nigel would have stayed a lone wolf if his ex hadn't insisted they join a pack before their daughter was born. Now Gabi has left and he's raising Brie alone whilst trying to keep in good with Lecter - the pack alpha. So when Lecter needs him for a job and sends over a babysitter, Nigel can't really refuse. Though don't think he hasn't considered it when the sitter turns out to be some kid called Aiden who has exactly zero childcare experience!

Notes

Please note - this is not Omegaverse, I know I write a lot of it, but I thought I should point that out as I refer to the pack alpha in this fic and he is just that, not actually an alpha in the A/B/O sense. Also, no surprise knotting in the future.

Trying something new with this and a few other recent fics - of writing rarepairs as AU. Most of the time I write them as canon to their source material, but this is fun too :D

Now with this fab art from the wonderful Insanelyartful!

Chapter 1

If Nigel had had any choice, he likely would have looked for a sitter from beyond the pack. He wanted his daughter to have more than just that group and their influence. But given that Brie, at five years old, had already gone through her first transformation *and* the full moon was fast approaching, he had to make do with whoever the pack leader was sending over. It was an early age to start shifting, and he hated that it was likely brought on by their family circumstances. Most kids didn't start to shift until they were eight or ten if before puberty at all, and Brie was dealing like a champ, but that didn't make him feel any better about it.

Alpha Lecter was fair, but he was firm and when he said he needed Nigel for a job and would provide the sitter, well - it wasn't like Nigel had much of a fucking choice.

He had grown up a lone wolf, but Gabi had convinced him to join the pack when she got pregnant… Before she up and left him for some asshole American. And then he remained in

the pack in the alpha's good graces - Brie was one of them so he couldn't go anywhere without giving her up to them. And that was never going to fucking happen. Especially now she was shifting, her wolf emerging at such an early age to protect her from all the upheaval, or so it felt.

He did jobs for Lecter here and there to keep good with the pack - when he needed the right kind of muscle that Nigel could provide. And this was one of those occasions. When he'd explained Brie had already had her first shift, Lecter had understood completely and an appropriate sitter was on the way.

Brie was settled watching cartoons when the doorbell rang. Nigel had already explained that he had to go do some work and a nice lady wolf would come look after her. She had actually been excited - apparently Nigel could never braid her hair the way she wanted - so this would be her chance. Nigel had huffed, but she was right of course, his hands were too damaged from past violence, she needed someone with nimble fingers.

Nigel pulled open the door, expecting some girly teenager or better yet, a wizened but experienced grandmother. Not-

"Mr Ibanescu? Hi, I'm Aiden. Alpha Lecter sent me."

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Nigel had muttered obscenities in Romanian as he let the guy in. Brie came running out to the hall, excited to meet her new friend and ask -

"Daddy, why were you swearing?"

"Don't you mind it sweetheart, get yourself upstairs and ready for bed whilst I talk to my friend here, okay?" Nigel kept from his tone the angry growl that wanted to break.

Brie gave him a side-on, precocious *I know something's going on* glance but then nodded and did as she was told. Damn, he was gonna have such trouble with that one.

He turned back to Aiden standing on the threshold and took in a deep breath, wishing for all hell he had a cigarette between his lips as he did so. "You better come in." He did growl that time and indicated for the kid to head down the hall and into the kitchen at the end.

"Lecter sent *you*?" Nigel asked. He would never have questioned the pack leader's judgement in the past. As much as he wasn't a pack wolf at heart, he respected Lecter and found him to be a decent guy. This was throwing that into some serious questioning.

"Yeah." Aiden's reply was clipped and he looked annoyed. "He said it would help him out. Is there a problem?"

"I was expecting someone with-"

"Breasts?" Aiden quirked a brow and the corner of his lips twitched.

“You bet your fucking ass I was. Someone who knows a damn thing about kids.” Nigel growled, trying to keep his temper in check.

“You know about kids. You don’t have breasts.” Aiden made a point of looking him over and Nigel’s jaw tightened at the appraisal. *Little shit*.

“I’m her father, I know about Brie. You don’t look old enough to shave, much less be a father, what do you know about kids. You babysit a lot?”

Aiden shook his head. “This is my first time-”

“The fuck?!” Nigel clenched and unclenched his fist, his hand wanting to grab for a pack of smokes. Was this some kind of fucking joke? What was Lecter playing at?

“But, if you’ll let me finish.” Aiden stated, hard. He gave Nigel a pointed look that sent an unexpected shiver through him and he gave a curt nod for Aiden to carry on as he ignored the pull in his gut at that tone.

Aiden continued - “Hannibal told me that your daughter has already had her first shift. I shifted young too. Since I was six. It can be rough, and I guess he thought that she might be better looked after by someone who had that experience than someone who… is qualified in childcare by the presence of breasts.” Aiden’s tone went from serious and thoughtful to damn near playful - so did his smile.

Nigel huffed, not having any other retort. It didn’t escape his notice that the young wolf seemed to be on first names terms with the alpha.

Brie came back down then and her little feet sounded along the hallway until she stood in the kitchen doorway.

“All done daddy. I cleaned by teef.” She pulled her mouth into a wide grimace as if to demonstrate.

“Good job, *pui de lup*.” Nigel beamed at her and strode over to ruffle her shoulder length waves. He looked back at Aiden who was smiling gently at the interaction and that made Nigel feel all kinds of annoyed and flustered. He shook it off and said - “Brie, this is Aiden. He’s gonna look after you tonight while I’m out. I want you to be good for him okay? Go to bed when he says. No fussing.”

She was nodding eagerly and then looked to Aiden. “Do you know how to braid hair?”

Aiden smiled warmly at her. “You know, I don’t, but what I do have is a smart phone and we can look up all kinds of tutorials and find just the right braids to try. I’m sure we can work it out together.”

Brie did the little excited jiggle from foot to foot that she did, and Nigel couldn’t help but smile at that. Maybe this kid would do alright. “Okay, you go find your barrettes. I just need a word with Aiden before I leave.”

Brie nodded excitedly and dashed off again. He turned back to Aiden with as menacing a look as he could manage in the face of the smile that was still in place on the kid's face.

"You smoke?" Nigel asked gruffly.

"Um, I'm good thanks." Aiden's brows knit together slightly.

"I'm not fucking offering, I'm asking if you smoke. No smoking in the house, no smoking around Brie." Nigel ordered.

Aiden gave a nod. "Got it. I don't smoke, so… um, no problem."

Nigel rolled his eyes and shook his head. "Is every conversation with you going to be this hard work?"

"Maybe if you were just more clear in your questions?" Aiden countered with no little amount of sass. And there was that pull again. *Fuck no.*

"Don't be a fucking brat. I don't want my kid picking up bad habits from you." Nigel was more fierce in his tone now, wanting to give this guy no further excuse to respond in any way that might be slightly… what? Enticing? Fuck, that was it exactly. He barrelled on. "I mean, use your common sense, but no booze, no smokes, nobody over. I don't want to get back and find some little girlfriend has joined you on my sofa."

"Not a problem." Aiden's lips quirked again and Nigel felt that smile in his balls.

Fuck.

"Just… no stupid shit ok? You look after Brie, keep her entertained. At seven thirty she has a glass of milk and then goes up to bed. Read her a story and then let her sleep. Just… look after her until I get home." Nigel started with anger but it was wavering as he thought about his little girl safe here and sleeping whilst he was taking care of Lecter's business. "Just… keep her safe ok? If she has a nightmare she might shift."

Aiden's smile had dropped and he nodded. "I know. I've been there. Seriously, she'll be fine, I've got this." It wasn't dismissive, it was confident and it made Nigel feel better than he thought it might.

Nigel nodded. "Okay. I'll leave my number on the fridge." He moved over and started scrawling it at the bottom of the to-do wipe board on there. "If there are any problems, any-fucking-thing at all, you call me. Right?"

Aiden nodded and his smile returned, gentle and calming. "Of course. Please don't worry Mr Ibanescu, I won't let anything happen to her."

Nigel thought for a moment that the kid was going to lay a comforting hand on his arm, and was so fucking glad he didn't. He didn't need that kind of trouble in his life. And even so he couldn't stop himself replying gently -

"Call me Nigel."

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Brie was delightfully precocious and Aiden had to admit, she made enjoyable company. Not that he didn't like kids, he had just little cause to be around them, but it was easy with Brie. They weren't unalike, and he remembered himself that young - how hard it had been to start shifting so early. It made you grow up quick, gave you a responsibility you had no choice in and never asked for.

They had watched a few tutorials and now he sat on the floor with her in front of him, chattering away as he braided. And not too badly, he had to admit.

"Was daddy mad at you? He seemed mad."

Aiden chuckled. "No I don't think so. He just wanted to make sure I look after you good."

"Hmm." She replied thoughtfully. "Daddy is usually mad at everyone. Except me, so if he *was* mad, you shouldn't be upset about it. I like you, that's all that counts."

That made Aiden grin. "Well, that's good. Dad always grumpy like that huh?" He couldn't help his curiosity. The man was clearly not a pack wolf and yet he was here with the pack, and Aiden knew how that felt. He'd spent a lot of years angry after Hannibal had taken him under his wing.

"Yeah, since Mama's been gone. That made him sad."

Aiden stilled for a moment, concerned at the subject they'd strayed into. He didn't want to stir up anything that might upset the little girl, especially if it might result in her shifting. But she sat happily still combing the hair of the doll in her lap so he allowed himself to relax.

"My real name is Gabriela but daddy calls me Brie. I don't like my real name because it was mama's name. I like having my own name." She said it cheerily enough and Aiden took a moment to process it. He wasn't going to pry further but she continued anyway. "I think it upsets daddy that I don't like mama's name, because he thinks it means I don't like her. I don't… um, I don't really remember her.." There was a slight note of sadness there that Aiden could understand with but was unsure how to respond to.

A moment later and she was chattering away happily about how one of the kids in daycare had the best braids she had ever seen and now her's were going to be even better.

It actually warmed Aiden more than he could say - he wished he had been as well adjusted as this little one. Her dad was obviously doing right by her, she was doing so good despite early shifting. He had been practically feral. He had not been well adjusted.

Brie, on the other hand, was a delight. Aiden had more fun than he thought he would just sat braiding hair and watching cartoons until it was time to go to bed. She was really well behaved, and pretty much walked him through the whole routine. Explaining that - "I'm not going to fuss, so you can tell daddy I was really good and then he might be less angry with you. And I'd like that because you are nice."

It made Aiden chuckle… and strangely hope that it would work.

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Nigel hissed at the tight pain across the broken skin of his knuckles as he tried to quietly open the front door. He almost had it when the door opened and Aiden stood the other side with a frown, which melted into concern.

“Shit. Are you ok?”

“Fucking peachy.” Nigel growled at the ridiculous question, ignoring the genuine look of worry. “Where’s Brie? Is she okay?”

Aiden nodded. “She’s fine, she’s sleeping. Went to bed right on time. She’s a good kid.”

Nigel felt himself sag a little with the relief at knowing she was safe and sound and sleeping her way through his return in this state. He pushed passed the younger wolf and strode to the kitchen. He was trying to wrestle the first aid kit out of the cupboard when Aiden came in behind him.

He felt him come close behind him, turning to growl as Aiden reached to help him with the kit. Aiden fell back a little, giving Nigel enough room to struggle the kit out and onto the kitchen table. Nigel stumbled back to keep it steady and knocked one of the chairs as he did so - it clattered noisily across the floor for a moment.

“Fuck.” He muttered, stopped, took a breath.

Aiden was there again then, pulling the chair out so Nigel could take a seat, then taking one himself. He quietly reached over and took the kit, opening it and starting to unpack some of the contents before Nigel finally took his seat.

The silence remained for a few minutes as Aiden dug out antiseptic wipes and bandages, laying them out carefully before looking up at Nigel.

“Let me help, okay? You aren’t going to be able to clean this up properly on your own.” Aiden told him gently, even so the tone didn’t seem like there was any room to argue. So Nigel just grunted in response and put his hands flat on the table.

They were shredded - opening old wounds he hadn’t thought about in years. The long past, before he met Gabi and got her pregnant and wanted to be a better man for them. His angry history of doing what he must to survive, and having nothing but his brute strength as an asset. A history he didn’t want to repeat.

He let out a heavy sigh, reminding himself this wasn’t the same. At the beginning of the evening he hadn’t been so sure - his instructions were vague - that there was trouble and Lecter needed muscle. Turned out to be a bar on the edge of pack territory, getting trouble from a local gang. Not any more. Nigel and a couple of other heavies waded in and made them think twice about it in the future.

It was okay, not the same as the cage fights, he had to keep reminding himself. But that didn't make the searing pain in his knuckles any less, and didn't make him feel any better about more damage to his already fucked up hands.

He was lost in his thoughts when Aiden took hold of his hands and started to inspect the cuts and bruises. It took a moment of savouring the gentle touch before Nigel started to pull back, but Aiden tugged them back into place and glared hard at him.

"Don't be stupid. Let me help you. It's nothing I haven't seen before." Aiden's own soft growl came through and Nigel hoped the kid didn't feel the shiver it sent through him. So he just gave another grunt.

Aiden released his hands for a moment and opened the packaging, starting then at cleaning Nigel's knuckles with the wipes.

"Are you okay?" Aiden asked, looking down, not making eye contact - which Nigel was glad of.

"What does it fucking look like." Nigel started to snap but it lost some bite towards the end as Aiden pinned him with another look. So Nigel just cleared his throat then and muttered "I've had worse."

"I can tell." Aiden replied, lightly tracing a finger over old scars.

Nigel knew Aiden felt the shudder at that, and their eyes met again. Something there, a spark of something that Nigel wasn't in anyway willing or wanting to explore. Instead he cleared his throat and looked down.

Aiden continued to clean his knuckles up and started to speak softly. "You've fought a lot. I've seen this before. Before I joined the pack… I know it can be hard to survive out there."

"You weren't born here?" Nigel asked, an equal softness in his voice, that he didn't seem to have much control over.

"No. Really not." Aiden chuckled lightly. He put aside the wipes and found some salve, starting to gently apply across the broken skin. "Hannibal found me when I was a teen, about ten years ago now. Not sure I would have made it much longer if he hadn't."

Nigel nodded, it wasn't good for lone wolf kids. At least he'd had his parents until his twenties, loners together - a family unit. But he sensed Aiden didn't even have that.

"You didn't have any family looking out for you?" Nigel asked, still not daring to look anywhere but the strangely delicate hands helping heal him.

"Mum died when I was a baby. Dad abandoned me when I was five. Which to be fair was a life improvement considering how much he beat me. My sitter dropped me home one day after his shift should have ended, and he wasn't there. It was a few days before anyone noticed or gave a damn. Ended up in and out of the system pretty quick - didn't want to be there, didn't want to feel caged. Human social welfare doesn't cater much for wolf kids. I ran

away and then just as living on the streets was starting to get fucking real, I started shifting. My wolf saved me. On instinct I headed out of the city and ended up out in the country, living off the woods a lot. Ended up shifted most of the time, it was safer that way, but… made me a bit…" he let out a chuckle. "I was pretty feral when Hannibal took me in. I was shifting less and falling in with bad crowds, human and wolf. Saw plenty of violence and shit on the streets." Aiden sighed.

"Shit kid, that's… fuck." Nigel shook his head, resisting the urge to turn his hands and take hold of Aiden's. He couldn't understand parents who didn't look out for their kids and found himself hoping Aiden's dad met a shitty end.

"Relax." Aiden purred softly, and Nigel realised he had clenched his fists, blood welling against the salve.

"I… I'm sorry you had to…"

Aiden shook his head and smiled. "It's not your fault. In fact, you know, it's good to see you being such a good dad. I don't have a lot of faith in lone wolves any more, I'm glad to be in the pack as hard as it can be sometimes. Instincts." He shrugged.

Nigel could understand that, lone wolves were used to small family groups at most, not large packs. The pack in Lecter's territory was essentially a small town. It could be overwhelming for a wolf not meant for that way of life.

They were sharing another soft smile and then Aiden looked away, his smile a little more of something else, and a slight blush Nigel was sure.

"Anyway, enough about me. Let's get these sorted." Aiden said, looking back to the kit and grabbing the gauze and bandages.

Nigel held still as Aiden wrapped his hands so tenderly that he felt a swirl of something like butterflies.

It was fucking butterflies.

"I could come back sometime to visit." Aiden started. "Um, Brie I mean. I know it can be hard shifting young. I, uh… I don't mind spending some time with her, if that's cool with you?"

Nigel's heartbeat picked up at the thought of Aiden coming over again, spending time with Brie… spending time with him…

"There." Aiden said with a smile as he finished bandaging Nigel's hands and started packing the kit back up.

"Um, yeah…" Nigel cleared his throat. "You can come by… um. I mean, Lecter has asked me to pull a regular shift as security at the bar for now, to make sure the trouble stays in check. If you… um, you'd like to sit for Brie again?"

Aiden looked up and smiled.

Nigel’s heart skipped a beat.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Mutual attraction is difficult to avoid...

If Aiden had any close friends who had any intention of socialising with him, they would likely have ribbed him for the fact that he had planned to work - as a babysitter - every Saturday night for the foreseeable future. As it was, he didn't, which saved him having to explain that spending time with Brie… and yes, maybe Nigel too, was the highlight of his week.

Tonight would make the fifth time he was sitting for Brie. She had been super excited to see him back the second time and had been glad that - "daddy didn't chase you away by being a grump." To which Nigel looked a little embarrassed and he was sure may have blushed slightly.

And wasn't that a beautiful sight?

He had no problem admitting to himself that he had instantly found the man attractive, and perhaps were the circumstances of their meeting different he might have even flirted… more than he did. Aiden knew what he wanted, when he wanted it, and rarely had compunctions about going for it. With Nigel he held himself back - he had wanted to do a good job with Brie, she didn't deserve for him to fuck up by sleeping with her dad and then bolting. And Hannibal had asked him to do this as a favour. Aiden got the impression he wanted Brie to help Aiden as much as he was there to help her - after all he still had deep hurt even now from all those years ago. Maybe looking after Brie would help him heal, help him finally settle properly into the pack. And he knew that was Hannibal's intention without it having to be said. Beyond Hannibal and Will, he wasn't close to anyone in the pack. Was friendly but not a friend to others who worked at Hannibal's restaurant where he pulled a few shifts.

Even after all these years he was ready to take off if he felt he needed to. Being around Brie, and the good hour or so he would spend talking with Nigel in the kitchen when he got home, was some of the only times that thought lifted. They seemed to connect so well, talking on and on about Brie, interests they had in common, and even more about those they didn't. Nigel's love of kung fu movies, Aiden's habit of losing himself to sketching and painting whenever he had the chance. Aiden had never connected with anyone like that before, but he was hesitant to see Nigel as his first real friend. It was maybe just because Nigel was a lone wolf too and knew what it was like to not put down roots, to need to be free - that thread of commonality that made friendship come easy.

He could imagine Nigel running as a free wolf and it stirred something within him.

On that first night, when he had helped Nigel bandage his hands he was sure the attraction was mutual and it was all he could do to walk away that night and not try to find his way into the older wolf's bed. That compulsion only grew with every moment they spent together and Aiden wasn't sure how much of it was physical attraction and how much an instinct to be with other lone wolves.

At least last week had been easier, the first time he and Nigel hadn't spent time sitting in the kitchen. Brie had been all over him the moment he arrived and Nigel clearly had nothing to add to his instructions from the previous weeks - or perhaps nothing to say to Aiden at all. He left barely saying goodbye to Aiden after he hugged and kissed Brie, and then damn near ushered Aiden out as soon as he got back from his shift.

He had been wringing his hands but Aiden noted they had healed well and he was no longer wearing the bandages. The thugs had obviously not returned to the bar either, so perhaps Nigel wouldn't be needed there for much longer.

The thought of it made Aiden's stomach drop. If they had put a stop to the trouble at the bar, then maybe there wouldn't be in need of Nigel much longer and so Aiden wouldn't be needed to look after Brie. He would have no excuse to see them.

It's fine. He told himself. It wasn't like he was going to get attached to them. Wasn't like it was any of his business.

He'd learned a long time ago that attachments were pointless, families were nothing but trouble. The only reason he stayed with the pack was because it was comfortable and Hannibal asked little of him... and he wasn't stupid. Survival was the point of life, and in the pack he could survive - he'd be an idiot to leave their protection, as much as he was prepared to do so if he had to. Survival.

If Nigel told him tonight that he didn't need a sitter anymore, then so be it. What did it matter to him?

It doesn't matter. Aiden repeated over and over to himself even as he looked in the mirror and took more care than he ever had before over whether his clothes looked good and if his hair was just right.

It doesn't matter at all.

*

"What ya doing daddy?" Brie asked, climbing up onto his bed and dangling her feet over the side - kicking them back and forth with a thud to the mattress as she watched him with a knowing smile.

"Nothing." Nigel huffed in return as he watched her in the mirror reflection.

She smirked. Damn well smirked - the little hellion.

"You look very nice." Brie commented, not losing one bit of the smile.

Nigel huffed again, a little growl to it and ignored her as he continued to button up his dark blue shirt.

“Daddy has to look nice at the bar, can’t be all scruffy standing on the door.” He told her, trying to convince himself as much as anything as he looked at his freshly combed hair, tidy jeans and his best shirt.

And goddamn that smirk!

“You didn’t look so nice last week. Or the week before. You just wore your old jeans and t-shirt then.” She countered, like butter wouldn’t fucking melt.

“Yeah, well… that was when I was expecting trouble, don’t want to ruin good clothes. Now we’re just keeping an eye out. No trouble. Look smart and not put off customers.”

She nodded and opened her mouth to continue when the doorbell rang and she excitedly exclaimed - “Aiden!”

She dashed off out of the room and her feet thundered down the stairs giving Nigel the chance to look at himself one last time in the mirror before following. He looked good, yeah, he was happy with it - sure it would be appreciated at the bar. Not that he was trying to impress anyone there… or anywhere. He definitely wasn't trying to impress anyone. He just… *dammit.*

He shook his head and started down the stairs feeling self-conscious and fighting the urge to go back up and change. Brie was opening the front door as he reached the final step and was face to face with the Aiden before he had chance to do anything. And… Aiden looked good. Damn, he looked really nice - looked about ready to go out on a date. Nigel’s stomach lurched.

He talked over Brie’s excited hello without even thinking - “do you have a date or something? I don’t want you bringing people here.”

“I… uh, no. Yes, I won’t... No I…” Aiden stammered. He seemed caught off guard, uncharacteristically stumbling over his words, and Nigel was supremely pissed to have apparently caught him out. He didn’t want the young wolf bringing fuckbuddies back here once Brie was in bed. The very thought made him angrier than he had been in a long while. His fists tightened so hard he could feel the stretch over his still healing knuckles.

“Maybe we should reconsider this-” Nigel started, deaf to Brie’s protests as he reached for the almost closed door to reopen it and see Aiden back out.

“I don’t have a date. No. Not after this and… I wasn’t going to bring anyone here.” Aiden blurted. “I.. I just, I need to do laundry.”

The excuse felt contrived but the look on Aiden’s face actually caused a pang of hurt through Nigel. He looked so worried that Nigel was going to ask him to leave - kick him out like every other fucker before Lecter took him in. He wasn’t that man. He wasn’t going to do that.

How could he ever consider doing something as shitty as that to Aiden, knowing even the little he did about his past?

Nigel's temper cooled and he closed the door, looking down at Brie's near tearful wide eyes.

"Go clean your teeth baby, I'm gonna chat with Aiden a minute."

Brie nodded and slowly made her way up the stairs, quiet as a mouse.

Fuck!

Nigel couldn't believe how close he had come to fucking everything up. Just the look on Bries' face told him how much Aiden already meant to her. It helped her to have someone who could relate to her shifting, and he was sure it helped Aiden too. A lump rose in his throat at the thought of nearly ending their little friendship when it meant so much to them both. Though for a moment he wasn't sure if he was thinking of Brie's friendship with Aiden or his own.

He walked to the kitchen and knew before he turned that Aiden had followed him.

"Sorry." Nigel huffed. "I… I know you're young and it's a Saturday night, but life is complicated enough for Brie, I don't need you bringing people back here."

"I wasn't going to. I told you." Aiden near snarled and Nigel felt it prickle over his skin.

They were silent for a moment and Aiden let out a sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose before looking back to Nigel. "I shouldn't have… I." He took a breath and let it out roughly. "I wanted to look nice… for you."

"I… what?" Nigel wasn't sure he'd heard right and now it was hard to hear anything over the blood pounding in his ears.

Aiden took a step closer to him and looked up the short height difference, through his lashes.

"I guess, I kinda like you and I resolved that no good would come of it and yet-" he indicated his clothes. "For some reason this seemed like a good idea in my brain for five seconds before I managed to keep from talking myself out of it. I don't even know if you swing that way." Aiden let out a light chuckle and looked down. "I just… I missed talking with you when you kicked me out last week and…" He looked up through lidded eyes. "I was hoping you wouldn't kick me out tonight."

"Fuck!" Was Nigel's immediate response. His eyes wide and his mouth watering. Nigel hoped Aiden's eyes didn't focus too intently on his crotch because he was struggling hard not to let his dick make his response to that loud and clear.

"I…" Nigel's mouth went from wet to uncomfortably dry, and it took all his control not to just grab the kid and push him up against the nearest wall. He had to remind himself over and over no good could come from this. No good ever came from a pretty face and a nice ass and he had Brie to think about now.

Even so he let out a soft and receptive growl as Aiden stepped closer again, pressing against him now so that he could definitely feel Nigel's hard response against him, as he looked up with a wry smile.

Nigel was frozen to the spot - stuck between wanting to push him away and pull him closer.

As it turned out, he didn't need to do either.

Aiden closed the distance - his lips lightly grazing Nigel's, about to press closer and then-

"Teef are done!" Brie announced happily as she came into the kitchen.

Nigel moved back from Aiden so quickly that he knocked into the table, muttering an expletive as he did so. Brie eyed him up and down and then frowned.

"Why is your face all red daddy, are you sick?"

"No baby, go watch TV ok? I need to get to work." Nigel stumbled over the words, not even daring a glance at Aiden despite being almost consumed by intrigue - was he smiling? Was he embarrassed? Was he blushing?

"Come on." He heard Aiden say joyfully. He watched then as the pair of them started down the hallway hand in hand, their backs to him. He followed and muttered a goodbye as they peeled off into the living room.

He didn't look back as he promptly escaped through the front door.

*

"What's with you?" Jack asked. "You look a million miles away."

"Just got a lot on my mind." He mumbled and Jack just smiled and nodded, like he understood completely. Which he likely thought he did considering he had a sick wife and four kids looking to him, as Nigel had learned over the previous weeks.

Nigel and Jack had been stood on the door the last couple of hours, the most trouble they'd had so far was one of the local drunks getting a bit mouthy when he was cut off for the night.

Otherwise it was quiet and that left plenty of time for Nigel to get in his own head about the whole thing with Aiden. Trouble on top of trouble… Not that there *was* a thing!

Though hadn't Aiden pretty much said he was up for… *something*?

It wasn't him being male. That wasn't exactly something that bothered pack wolves. It was a bit different for lone wolves because they by and large lived within human society and were restricted by their societal norms. Packs didn't much care who fucked who, who married who. They were a unit, details within the unit were unnecessary. They were essentially a large family for which everyone took some responsibility, so it just didn't matter. Adoption was common amongst packs - keeping cubs in the pack - so it wasn't like there was a fear of not

being able to reproduce. Hell, even Lecter's parter was male and they had at least one adopted son, he'd heard.

Nigel heard Aiden's name and snapped back to attention, realising Jack was saying something. Something about Aiden?!

"What?" It came out as more of a bark than he had intended.

"Aiden Galvin? He still looking after your kid?" Jack asked and Nigel frowned. He had never really shared much about himself, despite how much Jack liked to talk, and he was damn sure he'd never mentioned Aiden.

"Uh, yeah… good kid." Nigel said cautiously.

Jack nodded and smiled warmly. "Yeah he is. Bit of an odd one, a loner… but then you'll know all about that." Jack chuckled and slapped Nigel's back with one of his shovel-like hands. Nigel coughed from the blow.

"Good to see him socialising a bit more. He seems to only ever be around the alpha or at the restaurant. Which makes sense I guess… family business, but a kid needs to get out more I think."

Nigel was nodding, just out of habit of agreeing with Jack as it was usually easier, but then his brain clicked. "Family business?"

Jack frowned and looked to be considering his words. "Well, as close as it gets. I don't know if they ever officially adopted him, but I guess Aiden is the closest they have to their own."

Nigel frowned. He felt his blood rushing in his ears. Pounding at the same picked up rate as his heart. "Aiden is Lecter's kid?"

Jack looked at him like he was stupid. "I just said, I don't know if they ever officially adopted him, don't you listen?"

Aiden, was the adopted son of Hannibal Lecter.

Double fuck.

How did he not realise this?! When Aiden had mentioned Lecter now and then - how he helped him and got him off the streets… it had somehow never clicked. He just hadn't put two and two together to figure out that Aiden was actually the alpha's family!

The thought made Nigel shudder. Trouble on top of trouble - a pretty face and a nice ass… and adopted son of the pack leader. Lecter was clearly happy for Nigel to remain in the pack, to get his hands dirty here and there, but fucking his son? Yeah, probably wasn't going to be as peachy keen on that. All the more reason to turn Aiden down.

Nigel knew he'd been right to not let Aiden hang around the previous week, as they had grown accustomed to. He'd been fragile and the last thing he would have needed was to take comfort in Lecter's son, not that that it was the kid's fault.

The night had been rough - one of the guys at the bar had seemed familiar, looked so much like someone Nigel used to know - couldn't be because that man was dead now. But the resemblance had been so uncanny that it had taken Nigel immediately back to his past. That man was dead because of Nigel, because Nigel had picked a fight with the wrong asshole and was recovering from smashed jaw when he should have been in the cage. That man had fought in his place, despite having not a single fucking chance against the kind of brute Nigel was normally pitted against. One punch had knocked him out and he'd never woken up again.

The shame and anger of it, of everything he had done back then - the people he had hurt to survive - had washed over him. The thought of going home to Aiden and shooting the shit as they had done for previous weeks, made him sick. He couldn't try and act like he was just a normal fucking person without all this shit behind him. Sometimes it was too hard to try. Especially when he was sure one kind word from the boy would have had him crying on him or taking solace in him.

There was no good that would come of letting Aiden close, one way or the other. Lecter knew about his past, enough of it anyway - he'd had to tell him to be let into the pack. The alpha probably thought he was a fucking monster, no way he'd want his kid anywhere near him. His only thought had been for how Aiden could help Brie - getting close to Nigel was likely not part of Lecter's plan.

"Gonna walk the perimeter." He told Jack, before setting off to walk the circuit around the bar and make sure no one was causing trouble out the back thinking they wouldn't be seen. Not that he would likely have clocked them if they were, his thoughts were still so consuming.

He licked his lips as he remembered the heat of Aiden's breath across them. Another lone wolf, someone who could relate to both himself and Brie. Another survivor.

And, damn, he was good with Brie… And with himself. There was something in the way he talked to Nigel that made him feel lighter. And on occasion, make his balls tighten. That mixture of confidence and anger, sass and smiles. Damn, too much like Gabi in that respect. Nigel shook his head - he definitely had a type.

He hadn't been with a guy in a long while and then it was all quick and messy - taking pleasure with each other when they could to escape for a moment the horror of the fighting.

He shook the thought from his head. He wasn't even sure why he was thinking about this. It didn't matter if he and Aiden could be good together - it wasn't going to happen. He couldn't let it.

"Snap the fuck out of it." He told himself, scuffing his boot in the gravel as he walked. "Just fucking think of Brie!" She was the only important thing. She was safer and happier in the pack so he wasn't going to do anything to endanger that. No matter what his cock said. Nothing to risk Lecter throwing them out of the pack.

*

When Nigel got home, Aiden was waiting for him on the bottom of the stairs. He hadn't meant to be, but he wanted to get shit sorted. After he had put Brie to bed he'd just sat there to ruminate and hadn't moved despite both ass cheeks now being completely numb.

He watched as the handle turned and the door opened, as Nigel quietly let himself in and then stopped at the sight of him sitting there. Waiting.

Nigel let out a heavy sigh, closed the door gently and then stalked into the kitchen.

It took a moment for Aiden to follow, all stiff and numb from sitting there so long, like a damn idiot. "I'm sorry about earlier." He blurted as he caught up to Nigel in the kitchen. Nigel didn't turn or reply and Aiden found himself filling the silence with - "Or... I'm not? I guess I'm waiting to take your lead."

Nigel pulled open the fridge and took out a beer, hesitating for a moment and then apparently deciding against grabbing a second beer and offering it to Aiden as he had so many times before. He closed the fridge and finally turned to face him.

"Kid, I… What do you want me to say? That I want to fuck you? That I haven't thought about it? Sure. But you're Brie's sitter, as designated by the damn alpha! She needs a good sitter who she likes and trusts, much more than I need to get my dick wet."

Aiden felt the rejection in his chest as it tightened. "I hadn't… I hadn't thought it through." He admitted, realising it in that moment. He really hadn't considered the consequences that closely. He wasn't sure whether he'd been looking for a bit of fun or maybe something more if there wasn't a child involved. But there was, and both scenarios would put Brie in the middle. Maybe Nigel was right, they couldn't fuck around - it would get messy and complicated and it was Brie that would end up losing in it. The same if they decided to date - and what a hell of a thing to even consider! Aiden didn't date, and had no interest in anything more than a short term fling at best. But if they *did* date? What happened if they had a disagreement, a tiff? What if they broke up? Where would that leave Brie? She already had one parent AWOL.

"I'm sorry." Aiden sighed, and meant it. "I wouldn't do anything that upset Brie. I'm sorry."

Nigel sighed too then put his unopened beer onto the table.

They looked at each other a long moment.

"I'm sorry I kicked you out last week, I should have explained why." Nigel admitted.

Aiden shook his head. "It isn't my business." He had to admit to himself he had wondered if Nigel had plans, someone coming over. A nice local single mother, someone stable and loving who he could create a family unit with him.

"We're friends… I'd like us to be friends. I should have explained. I…" Nigel paused and picked at the label on his beer bottle. "I've never talked much about this, and I'm only telling you because you know what it's like to have to do what you need to out there, without a pack… And I don't want to seem like an asshole for kicking you out."

Aiden frowned and stepped closer, until they both settled into leaning against the kitchen counter alongside each other, like friends - maybe.

“You don’t have to say anything, but… if you want to, I’ll listen.” Aiden said, putting his hand on Nigel’s arm for the briefest of moments and hating the spark of energy it sent coursing through him.

Nigel looked at him, hard. “I used to fight. That was how I made money, and how I stayed safe. I was fucking savage. I… I never killed anyone with my own two hands... Not that I know of.” He shook his head. “Well, fuck, I guess any one of them could have died later and I’d have never known. And then there was this one guy… a fucking kid really. We fooled around sometimes because we could, we needed it. We both had the same manager. And by that I mean pimp really. He was the fucker that practically kept us living in a shithole and bringing us out to fight for him. He took his fucking cut.”

Aiden saw Nigel’s fists balled at his side, painfully. He moved so he was standing in front of Nigel, taking hold of his hands and forcing them to unfurl into his own.

Nigel cast his eyes down as he continued. “He wasn’t made for fighting but he didn’t have any other options, like a lot of us. So I tried to look out for him. I didn’t do a good enough job, and now he’s fucking dead.” He shook his head. “I’ve got one job - protect Brie. Not doing a good enough job with that is not an option.”

“Nigel…” Aiden breathed out his name and leaned in, pressing his forehead to Nigel’s. “You could never fail Brie. And… she’s here. She’s in the pack, and... you clearly don’t fit, but you stay for her to be safe. She isn’t some kid in over their head with the wrong people, you… you’re such a good fucking dad.” There was a edge to those words that he hadn’t intended, more emotion than he thought he had left where family was concerned. “Believe me, I know.”

Nigel looked at him but didn’t pull back, their faces still so close. Suddenly Nigel’s fist was balled in the front of his shirt, keeping him close.

“Aiden. If this were before Brie, before Gabi? I’d have fucked you on the kitchen table. You’re fucking exquisite, you the nearest thing I’ve had to a friend in a very long time and… You smell like the woods and freedom. I can’t tell you how much I want that, how much I want you. But you’re the fucking alpha’s kid, I need to keep that man on side, I can’t get kicked out of the pa-”

Aiden was quivering at the words, it felt like Nigel’s grip on his shirt was the only thing holding him up as he pressed his mouth hungrily to Nigel’s. They both groaned into it, Nigel grunting as he pushed Aiden back against the fridge - hands all over each other now and quickly filling cocks pressed against each other. The kiss was amazing, the way they fit together in a way Aiden knew he never had with anyone before. Their lips and tongues moving together just as Aiden liked, as though they had kissed before and knew how to please the other already.

This was such a bad idea. So bad… But so good. So very good.

He was trying to unbutton Nigel's shirt, wondering if the man would really fuck him on the table, when Nigel's hand started kneading at his cock through his jeans. Aiden's breath hitched and then he moaned into Nigel's mouth. He was going to cum in his pants at this rate.

He broke back to gasp for breath, managing to pant out - "I really want you to fuck me right n-"

They both stilled at the sound of crying and then a distant sob of - "daddy".

Nigel didn't even say anything, didn't even look at Aiden - just let go of him and stalked from the room and up the stairs to comfort his daughter. Maybe she'd had a nightmare? Maybe she woke up and was scared? Maybe it was just fate trying to tell them that this was as fucking stupid as they both knew it was.

Aiden quietly let himself out.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Apparently, doing nothing is not an option.

Aiden took the empty boxes out back and then returned to the restaurant to finish putting the grocery delivery in the walk in fridge.

This was all stuff Will could do himself and yet he had asked Aiden to pull one of his occasional shifts at his and Hannibal's restaurant as a favour. Which was code for - Will wanted to talk about something.

He had known Will Graham as long as he had known Hannibal Lecter, he was the pack alpha's mate and husband. And along with Hannibal, had practically raised him since he arrived in pack territory. Will was a good guy - and he and Hannibal made for a perfect combination in everything they did. He wasn't sure Hannibal would be half as good an alpha if he didn't have his perfect mate. Sometimes Aiden couldn't help wondering what that might be like.

Before he'd met Nigel, he had little interest in finding a mate, even less interest in pondering what it would be like to have one. He was a loner who had stayed with the pack for self preservation. Any day, he knew, he might wake up and decide that was the day he didn't need to be there any more. He'd strike out on his own like the lone wolf that he was.

It wasn't like lone wolves didn't ever join packs, but they didn't have the same instinct, the same drive to belong. So half the ones that did, ended up leaving. And those that stayed it was often because they found something to stay for that overrode their instincts to remain solitary - a lover, a partner, a family.

Aiden shook off the idea, annoyed at having ever met Nigel and churned up these thoughts. He wondered if he'd even feel this way if they really had just fucked on the kitchen table. Just sex - just getting it out of their system. And instead he was left wanting and feeling… something.

Will walked into the kitchen with a bunch of freshly laundered tea cloths and started to put them in the appropriate drawers.

"Oh hey. You ok bussing tables a bit when we open? Freddie called in." Will spoke as though this hadn't already been agreed. It was the way he was - double checking, but also it kinda felt like a trap.

Because when Aiden answered - "Sure it's fine."

Will smiled and said - “Great! We haven’t hung out in a while, it would be good to catch up.”

Catch up was overprotective dad talk for *make sure you’re ok.* Aiden had learned early on. He smiled anyway, because he couldn’t be pissed at Will giving a shit when so few before him ever had.

“Ok, ask your questions.” Aiden let out a sigh, laced with humour as it was, and hoisted himself up to sit on one of the countertops. That got a frown from Will, but the man chose to ignore the tone and inappropriate use of kitchen facilities in favour of the conversation.

“I just wondered how you are doing is all. How is babysitting going? Is Brie doing ok?” Concern laced his words and Aiden knew that they were both equally for him and Brie. It sat heavy in his chest.

“Yeah she’s cool. Well adjusted, happy. Nice kid.” He cleared his throat, feeling a little emotional just thinking about how happy he was that her childhood, thankfully, differed so greatly from his own.

Will smiled and nodded. “When Hannibal suggested you sitting for Nigel I knew it would be a great idea. There aren’t many around here who can empathise with the little girl, and it’s good she knows she has you in her corner.”

Aiden nodded, unable to find the words through the thickness in his throat and the tightness in his chest that swelled at the sudden mental image of Nigel and Brie. Of what he was or wasn’t in their lives. It wasn’t something that sat comfortably with him.

“We hoped it would be a little cathartic for you too?” Will added tentatively, finishing putting away the linens and turning to lean back against the counter opposite Aiden.

There was a moment of silence then where Aiden wasn’t sure what, if anything, to say.

He wasn’t sure he even could say anything as the thought of Nigel clawed at his brain again. He wanted to tell Will about it - or ask about it. He wanted to say how it felt to be able to help Brie and that he was glad to be in her life but that also… he really wanted her dad.

Fuck.

He pushed the thought aside. So ridiculous. They had become friends and he found the man more than a little attractive. But what would they do? Fuck… mate? That was a fucking joke and he couldn’t believe that his brain had even supplied the notion. Instinct, nothing more - another lone wolf after so long feeling trapped in the pack. Of course his instincts would draw him to Nigel.

“You seem friendly with Nigel too.” Will’s words were leading, but Aiden ignored them.

The image of them kissing flashed unhelpfully into his brain.

He felt a blush rising up his neck and jumped off the countertop to busy himself putting away some plates. The restaurant didn't open for another hour and there were always things to keep a person busy.

"Everything ok?" Will asked.

"Yeah, sure." Aiden kept his voice as level as he could despite his mind replaying the kiss he and Nigel had shared, over and over. There was undeniably good chemistry between them, and Aiden wondered if it would be easier just to sleep with the guy and get it out of his system. Curb all these ridiculous thoughts of mating and possibly being together when it wasn't going to happen. That was just his instincts fucking him up.

Will came close behind him to all but whisper. "Ok, because for a minute there I thought you were getting all flustered at the thought of Nigel Ibanescu." Despite the ringing humour in Will's voice it made Aiden's skin chill.

Will cleared his throat and stepped back. "And who can blame you? He is pretty hot." Will winked and snapped a tea cloth at Aiden's rump and started off out of the kitchen, casting a grin back over his shoulder as he went.

"Fuck." Aiden leaned against the counter. Will was always stupidly good at picking up on things, and clearly Aiden wasn't being as subtle as he had thought.

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As the lunch crowd thinned and more staff came in for the afternoon shift, Will gave Aiden a meaningful look that told him not to leave until they had spoken again. Now that Aiden had had hours to mull over Will's words.

"You taking off?" Will asked when Aiden grabbed his jacket from the office where Will sat doing some paperwork.

"Yeah, everyone else is here now."

Will set aside the laptop and looked up at him. "You wanna talk before you go?"

Aiden was about to grumble but he appreciated it. He shook his head anyway, the last thing he wanted to do was fall into an even deeper obsession over that damn kiss. It wasn't like it was anything serious… even if Nigel was the first person he'd ever felt this kind of connection to. The first he'd ever been drawn to in this way. He'd slept with plenty of people, he enjoyed sex but always no strings. Nothing serious.

And, despite Will's encouraging smile, there was a difference between Will joking that he had a crush on the man, and he and Hannibal actually being ok with them hooking up. He wasn't really sure how they would feel, but Nigel's concern over the possible ramifications of it - of them - was enough to keep him quiet.

The thought of no strings sex with Nigel left him hollow. He wanted to get to know the man, tease and flirt with him. Go on dates or take day trips with him and Brie. He wanted to run in

the woods with him as wolves. Or at least his instincts told him as much.

Either way, the thought scared him.

Fucking instincts.

Aiden left the office and restaurant behind, lost in his own thoughts as he tried to remind himself he wasn't part of the pack. He didn't belong. He wasn't meant to mate and settle here.

But then, neither was Nigel.

He growled at himself, annoyed with this fixation. These fucking instincts driving him towards something so ridiculous. This likely would never have felt this way had they just damn well fucked and got that out of their systems.

The idea planted like a seed in his mind that grew, extraordinarily fast. Maybe if they just fucked - no strings or expectations - his instincts would stop fucking with him.

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Nigel had hiked these woods so many times he was sure half the paths were worn by him alone. It was the place on pack land that he felt most at home - most free.

It was a short walk from behind their house and when Brie was a baby he'd taken her strapped to his chest in a sling. Now that she was older she walked but it meant they couldn't go as far. Just the well worn public trail off of the little car park and picnic area. They went a little further at the full moon when he brought Brie here to shift and run as her wolfself.

“I think Aiden would like this.” Brie said matter of factly as they picked their way through a slightly overgrown patch.

The words chilled him, and then brought back the very clear image of their heated encounter… and chilled him some more. Aiden was fucking dangerous. The kid threatened to derail everything he had built here for Brie. Because fuck knows if things were different, if there was no Brie he'd have taken off with him. If Brie hadn't woken up he'd have fucked him right there, maybe even been unable to stop from claiming him and making a life with that fucking wolf.

And after Gabi that was not something he was in the market for - Aiden was practically the pack leaders son. If Brie hadn't woken up then, she would have woken in the morning to find them playing happy families - their own little pack of three. And if he got thrown out of the pack maybe Aiden would come with them - be lone wolves together. But that wasn't what was best for Brie. Brie needed to be in the pack, safety in their numbers, stability.

And that's all that mattered.

“Daddy!” Brie tugged sharply on his arm, pulling him out of his thoughts

“What? What is it baby?”

“I said, can we invite Aiden next time we come here?” before he could answer she got all excited. “Oh, oh or we could invite him at the full moon! We could all run together. Please daddy.”

“We'll see.” Nigel replied gruffly, trying hard not to let into his heart the idea of running with the man. Damn that would be…

He pushed the thoughts down, and tried not to reflect on how little he had been bothered about running with Gabi. That should have been a sign of course. It was one of the most basic things wolves did - to run together at the full moon. You did it with close friends, family, loved ones. You most certainly did it with long term romantic partners… unless you really just didn’t feel that inclination. And that never bode well.

The fact was there was a lot he could regret about Gabi because it had been shit, and they really hadn’t been a good match. And if he hadn’t knocked her up life would be very different. And he wouldn't change anything about that.

He looked down at Brie as she battled with some brambles, determination of a wolf writ large in each expression and movement.

He could never, ever regret Gabi. Because no matter what, had it not happened, good or bad as it was - mostly pretty fucking bad. If it had never happened he wouldn’t have Brie, and she was everything.

The fact that Brie liked Aiden and wanted to include him just made this whole fucking thing more painful. Regardless of any issues with Lecter, Nigel was not going to put Brie in a position of becoming close to someone only to have it not work out, to have them leave like her mum did and hurt her like that. And that someone was sure as fuck not going to be the alpha’s ward, no matter how succulently tempting he was.

It was an hour of their usual scampering through the woods before they started for home. The usual being Brie assessing the woods, deciding that they were very suitable for their run at the full moon. Pointing out a few places where she might like to investigate in wolf form. Nigel of course nodded along, making comments here and there like she was the foreman on some job. Best job he ever fucking had.

They were a few minutes down the path when his phone caught signal again and beeped two message alerts.

He pulled out his phone and saw they were both from Aiden.

His heart pounded for a moment and his palms grew sweaty. Brie looked up at him, askew.

“Daddy. Don’t shift. I’m tired, I want to go home.”

Nigel’s heart swelled at his daughter’s ability to already tune into other wolves, even if she wasn’t always on the money. He ruffled her hair and grinned.

“It’s ok baby. I’m not going to wolf out.” He made a growly face at her and she giggled before skipping along, starting to chatter happily again - this time something to do with Aiden and her playing with crayons.

He looked at the phone and put it back in his pocket.

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Brie was all bathed and fed and tucked up in bed. Her book bag ready for school in the morning as Nigel crept quietly back down the stairs and into the kitchen.

He had made a point of not looking at his phone the rest of the afternoon. He knew he should get the fuck over what all this stupid nonsense was, but he wanted to wait until he was alone to read Aiden’s messages.

And he was glad he did. He felt a shiver go over him as he scrolled to the first message. Brie was right, it was a feeling not too dissimilar to shifting, but then so were many things. Prolonged exercise, shock, fear, anticipation, arousal.

~Do you still need me to babysit? I know we had agreed it, but I wanted to check you hadn’t changed your mind after the other night?

Nigel spent much longer than he would like to admit, rereading that first message and trying to work out if there was some deeper meaning. Should he just take it at face value? When reading it should he picture grumpy Aiden saying it, or sassy Aiden? Because that made a huge difference to tone and meaning.

Nigel let out a long breath and grabbed a beer from the fridge before sitting at the table to read the second text - sent an hour later.

~Did I just make things weird? Should I have not said anything? Sorry. Let me know if you need a sitter.

Well that didn’t help clarify one little bit.

Nigel let out a huff and punched the keys a little more violently than probably called for.

~Of course I still need a sitter. He sent, before dropping his phone onto the table and draining the beer.

The phone beeped and Nigel wanted to hurl it across the room - it felt like the least stressful option. But he picked it up and read the reply.

~That seemed abrupt. Are you mad at me? I’m not sure this is a good idea if you are, but I don’t want to leave you with no help.

Oh that was definitely grumpy Aiden and Nigel sort of hated that he knew that. He started tapping in a new message, cooling a little as he did.

~I’m mad at the fucking situation, gorgeous. Aren’t you?

~Yeah. But I think we're talking about different situations. I know you have your hangups with this but I'm honestly DTF

Nigel frowned at the screen for a moment, before responding.

~What the fucking hell is DTF?

~Down. To. Fuck. Nigel, I get your issues with this, and I have my own too. But usually, when I see something I want, I go for it. It's the best way to get it out of my system.

~You want me to fuck me out of your system? I don't want Brie getting attached to you and this fucking things up.

Nigel swallowed, his mouth dry and his cock starting to ache. Was this sexting? Was he fucking sexting? Like a fucking teenager? He hated how it shot him through with a jolt of excitement, because there was nothing he wanted more in that moment than to fuck Aiden Galvin.

He balled his fists, stood, got another beer. Sat down and drained half of it in one long pull. He wiped his hand across his mouth before picking his phone up again.

He wasn't sure what he had planned to reply, it might have even been no, but in the minutes it had taken him to cool a little another text had arrived.

~You don't want Brie to end up hurt, I don't either. She doesn't have to know. As for Hannibal and Will? I never had a chance to sneak behind my parent's back as a teen, you'd be helping me with a rite of passage.

Nigel was processing that, and his mind was already starting to side with Aiden when a second message arrived.

~I don't want to pressure you. I just felt like you wanted me as much as I wanted you. And Nigel. I really want you.

There was another beep a moment later and his phone reported a media message. It took a second to open, during which time Nigel innocently frowned, wondering what the hell the kid was sending him.

He was in no way mentally prepared to open the picture of, presumably Aiden's, hard and leaking cock. In his surprise Nigel dropped the phone with something near a squeal.

"Fuuuuuuck."

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Aiden's heart was racing. He couldn't believe he was doing this. Not least because he was almost totally sure that he was just making things worse. He wasn't one to pull punches, he made the first move, he went after things he wanted - he had learned the necessity of that at a young age. He didn't want to fuck things up for Nigel, but this could just be the best course of action for both of them.

If this had been anyone else, he would have bedded them and got it out of his system. Moved on and not looked back. Not that he had ever felt this kind of connection before. Not that he knew what the hell to do with it.

But he was pretty sure three seconds after he sent it, that the thing to do was probably *not* send a dick pick to the father of the kid he babysat.

Time moved agonizingly slowly as he waited. His mind reeling through many possibilities, and he found the thought of Nigel turning him down - and worse - asking him not to look after Brie anymore, hurt.

He was rapidly losing his erection as it dawned on him that he might never see them again. Maybe Nigel really just didn't want him? Maybe he was too fucked up to take a chance on?

But then, maybe that would be for the best either way? That was one solution to this.

And he hated that there had to be a solution. Hated that he was so fucking damaged that he couldn't just pursue this like a normal wolf - convince Nigel he could be a parent to Brie, that they could be a family. If he were really one of the pack he would have made overtures, tried to see if Nigel was open to courting. Gone from there. But that wasn't who he was. He wasn't one of those wolves, and as much as he wanted Nigel he sure as hell wasn't going to let his instincts convince him into any of that shit.

Nigel had his own hang ups that didn't help. But Aiden understood them, and he respected them, he reminded himself - mentally kicking himself over the dick pick. That was a shitty move. He should apologise.

He should just fuck off and let the man be.

Tears pricked the corners of his eyes at the thought of that, and that made him so fucking angry at himself and the whole situation. Maybe he had just thrown away what had been his first real friendship.

The phone rang.

"Hello?" Nigel's voice seemed strained and that made his chest ache, thinking he had caused his friend any kind of discomfort.

When he tried to reply a short sob came out instead and he felt disgusted at himself for it.

"Aiden?" Nigel's tone was full of concern.

"Sorry, I… I'm an idiot." Aiden pulled himself back together, his words hard. "Please just, I don't want you to be without help. Forget I sent the picture and I'll just keep to myself and come babysit-"

"Forget you sent it? Gorgeous, I am sat here hard as a rock trying to convince myself not to invite you over right now so I can suck you until your brain explodes." Nigel growled.

"Oh."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

These boys are dumb. And they finally do the do.

Chapter Notes

NB: Mentions in this chapter of Aiden's childhood - non-graphic, not very in depth discussions about child abuse and neglect - on the same level as canon (for Blood and Chocolate)

Nigel lost the fight with his one last thread of self control, and he wasn't even a little bit sorry in that moment.

Of course, it had been totally impractical for Aiden to come over to the house that night. That hadn't stopped Nigel from talking dirty on the phone to him until the kid came in his fist with such a beautiful sound, that Nigel couldn't wait to hear it in person. See the pleasure written in his face. If… if they could just keep it secret from Brie and the alpha. No one needed to be involved, no one would get hurt.

They made arrangements to see each other the following lunchtime when Brie was at school. Nigel even made some sandwiches as he waited for Aiden to arrive. And when he did, he looked fucking delicious. There was an eager energy buzzing around him, sparkling eyes, tongue running over too sharp teeth. The sight made Nigel quiver.

"Can I come in?" Aiden asked as he stood on the stoop. He looked for a moment like he was expecting Nigel to reject him, like Nigel hadn't answered the door with a hungry look in his eyes and a condom and lube in his back pocket. Instead Nigel just gave a curt nod and held the door.

He turned and walked to the kitchen, looking back only once there to see that Aiden had closed the door and followed close behind him.

"So…" Aiden started, awkwardly. It was sort of endearing how he flipped from sexually aggressive to self conscious, even though Nigel wished he wouldn't. The kid was adorable - seriously fuckable. He had nothing to feel self conscious about as far as Nigel could figure.

Nigel grabbed him by his shirt and pulled him forward, pressing their mouths together before Aiden could say another word. They only had a few hours until school let out and he planned

on making the most of them. Not that Aiden seemed to mind one bit.

The kiss was even better than the one they had already shared. It was like Aiden read his fucking mind. It was nothing short of delicious and he couldn't help but ponder whether fucking would feel as good as this.

Aiden shrugged out of his jacket and then his hands were all over Nigel, as it missed the dining chair and flumped to the floor. First over his shoulders and down his back, then coming around front to paw at his shirt and start unbuttoning it. When Nigel took over doing that, Aiden's hands slipped around to his ass, squeezing it and pressing their crotches together.

Aiden pulled back for breath, but took little air in when he used it as an opportunity to pant against Nigel's ear -

"You made me so horny last night. I got hard again later just thinking about it and had to jerk off again… thinking about your mouth the whole time. I want to know how those fangs will feel against my cock."

Nigel groaned, grabbing Aiden back into a hungry kiss as his hips thrust involuntarily against the kid.

That was all the invitation Nigel needed to drop to his knees and start nuzzling against the hard outline of Aiden's cock through denim. When fingers smoothed into his hair and then clutched sharply, Nigel worked open the jeans enough to pull out Aiden's hard length and take it into his mouth.

Aiden groaned and wobbled a little, which had Nigel chuckling around his cock. That earned him some involuntary hair pulling - not that Nigel minded one bit.

He drew back, sucking, caressing with his tongue until he let Aiden fall from his mouth. He tongued at his slit until the boy was groaning again and then plunged down, taking him deep to the back of his throat and swallowing around the head of his cock.

It was a fair while since Nigel had been with a guy, but clearly he still had *it*. And Aiden seemed like he was going to crumble to the floor any moment. Gorgeous little moans escaping from him as Nigel sucked back and then took him deep again and again.

"I couldn't stop thinking about you last night..." Aiden started to babble. "Doing this, me sucking you... You fucking me over the table... fuck." Aiden suddenly shuddered as Nigel swallowed around him.

Nigel felt Aiden's cock pulse and his balls, resting almost on his chin, draw up. Then Aiden was coming down his throat and Nigel drew back enough not to gag, continuing to lavish attention on his cock whilst swallowing everything Aiden had, until the boy was writhing and whimpering. His fingers tightened in Nigel's hair again and tried to pull him back. After one last suck, Nigel did so.

He got to his feet quickly, practically holding the boy up on his shaky legs.

Aiden was panting just as he was, trembling as he clutched at Nigel's arms.

"That was... so..." Aiden struggled to find the words in his post orgasmic haze so Nigel just grinned and nodded. He was expecting the boy to just collapse totally against him, and really, Nigel wasn't adverse to the snuggling. But instead a determined hand landed on his own throbbing cock, squeezing it through his jeans.

"Will you fuck me on the table?" Aiden asked. Which had Nigel almost coming in his pants. "I know I must sound like a cock hungry whore but..." Aiden looked down and swallowed. That fear of rejection seemed to have surfaced again. "I just need to... It's been a long time… I can't stop thinking about-"

Nigel cut him off with a kiss.

Aiden seemed suddenly vulnerable with his admission and Nigel hated the thought of him feeling that way. And, fuck, did he want it too!

Nigel drew back and started to undo his own belt and trousers. "It's been a while for me too gorgeous. Even longer with a man. But... fuck, I don't think I've ever wanted to fuck someone as much as I want to fuck you right now."

Aiden's eyes closed as though he was savouring the words, the sentiment. And maybe he doubted Nigel? Maybe he thought that Nigel was just sweet talking him - which was true. But, as it turned out so were Nigel's words.

Nigel shucked down Aiden's trousers and turned him. Aiden went willingly and with a cheeky smile that sent a shiver through him. How the boy seemed to teeter between sassy and vulnerable made Nigel's head and heart spin. Aiden grunted as he pushed him down to the table and then moaned as he shuffled his feet apart.

Nigel had never been more grateful for the sturdy wooden table in his entire life. He pulled out the lube from his back pocket, now half way down his ass, and poured some onto his fingers. Aiden gasped when he pushed them cold against his flesh, before moaning and pushing back - spreading himself more. He was so relaxed from his orgasm that he opened beautifully.

"Fuck." Nigel shuddered with need as he slowly worked his fingers into Aiden. The boy was making the sweetest fucking noises, coming apart beneath him before he'd even got going.

He had been hopeful when he'd put the lube in his back pocket, even more so when he'd packed the condom too. He pulled it out with his dry hand and pulled the packet apart, rolling it onto his cock and lubing himself up before putting his attention back to Aiden. He had three fingers in him now and was drawing moan after little moan.

"So fucking gorgeous." Nigel leaned in to mumble the words against the back of Aiden's neck as he lined himself up. He pushed in slowly as Aiden gasped and clutched at the sides of the table.

"Nigel…" it came out as a soft moan.

Hearing Aiden moan his name was intoxicating. He was so tight, felt so good. He moved slowly at first until he was deep inside the boy and then his hips started to snap almost involuntarily. Burying himself over and over like a man possessed, until Aiden's breaths came out as gasps. Aiden felt so good - maybe it was just that he hadn't seen action in a while, but it already felt like the best fucking sex of his life. The way the kid squeezed around him, how they fit perfectly together.

"Slow-slower…" His words stuttered out and Nigel stopped immediately. "Sorry… It's been a while…"

"Sorry gorgeous." Nigel pressed the words to Aiden's neck and began to thrust again, slower but deep, as deep as he could go.

Aiden was groaning again, pushing back and then going pliant.

"So good…" Aiden moaned the words, breathless. "Ri-right there…"

Nigel knew the boy wasn't likely to cum again, but he was clearly enjoying this, getting pleasure from it as he pegged his prostate on each thrust. And that was almost enough to push Nigel over the edge.

He started to pick up the pace a little, moving them both against the table until the heavy wood was audibly scraping a little across the floor.

"So good…" Aiden moaned again, trembling as Nigel tried to be hard and gentle at the same, tried to find the perfect pleasure for them both. And then - "Nigel…" Aiden moaned his name again and it was all over.

His name had never sounded so sweet in anyone's mouth before and it tore through Nigel in a way he was sure nothing ever had before. He shook, holding Aiden to his chest as he spilled inside him with a grunt. He shuddered and breathed, resting against Aiden's back and feeling more complete than he had in a long time. Than he ever had.

He caught his breath, trying to ground himself and block out the way this was making him feel. It was just sex - secretly fucking the babysitter, that's all it could ever be.

Nigel stood and pulled out, taking care to pull the condom with him. He dropped it in the trash before pulling up his trousers. He didn't want to look back at Aiden, the temptation was too great to just take him upstairs and just fucking hold him.

He let out a breath and moved to the sink, filling two glasses with water and setting them down on the counter.

"I just want this to be clear. This is just sex. Brie doesn't find out about it. Your folks don't find out about - I don't need that kind of trouble."

"So… babysitter with benefits?" Aiden laughed. Nigel felt relief in his humour and finally turned.

Aiden was doing up his jeans as he leaned casually back against the wall - a picture of composure. Clearly, this really was just sex to him, and Nigel was grateful for that even if it caused an unnecessary pang in his chest.

Nigel chuckled as well and moved back to him until he could lean in and suck a deep kiss into Aiden's neck, relief washing over him. The easy feeling he so often had around Aiden came back to him and he knew he could do this. *They* could do this and he wouldn't let it get to him - wouldn't let this get into his brain and eat him up. He couldn't do that again. But he could let himself enjoy this for what it was.

"Well, if you want it to remain secret I don't think visible hickies are the way to go." Aiden pushed him back and Nigel allowed it. He felt so fucking hungry for this boy he wasn't sure how to contain it.

He picked him up in a fireman's carry as Aiden yelled and then laughed. Nigel lumbered up the stairs with him and then dropped Aiden onto his bed before sinking down on top of him and kissing him again.

When he pulled back Aiden looked drunk on lust and Nigel knew he must look the same.

"Nothing visible." Nigel muttered and lowered himself down whilst pushing Aiden's tshirt up until he could take Aiden's left nipple into his mouth. He swirled his tongue over it, licked and sucked until Aiden was moaning and writhing - arching off the bed with his once more rapidly hardening cock very apparent.

Nigel moved his mouth, dragging his lips an inch or two towards the centre of Aiden's chest before kissing again, and then sucking.

"Fuck!" Aiden cried and arched again, as Nigel rolled his nipple between his fingers and sucked a lovebite above his heart.

*

It became a regular thing. Usually at least two lunchtimes a week, when Nigel didn't have a day shift and Aiden wasn't working at the restaurant. And Aiden was loving it. Regular and hot, no strings fucking was exactly what he needed.

It helped that he felt so much himself with Nigel. Their liaisons allowed him to be casual and relaxed. Freer than he had ever felt in the pack before. Maybe it was because Nigel was a loner too - understood the freedom of being outside of a pack, and the need to remain free.

With Nigel he felt free.

He, of course, stopped himself from admitting that to the man. Babysitting with benefits was what they had agreed, and neither of them were interested in anything more. Despite his instincts, Aiden wasn't even sure what he'd do if Nigel wanted more from him.

No, he did. He'd probably repeat patterns of a life time and run away. And he really didn't want to do that.

Even so, he wasn't dumb to how much deeper he was getting into this, how much more he liked Nigel with every moment in his company. His humour, his gruffness. How great a dad he was to Brie. He and Brie were pretty much the two people in the pack he most wanted to spend time with.

With Nigel there was a casual intimacy that thrived for being contained to those moments between their lives - the lunchtimes and the occasional evenings. There was no sex during the evenings, not with Brie in the house. But when she was sleeping soundly upstairs when Nigel got in from work, they would make out like teetnagers in the kitchen, grind on each other until neither of them could take it any more and Aiden would go home. Leaving them both to resolve and relieve as they would.

More than once, despite trying not to, Aiden wondered what it would be like to wait up for Nigel and then go to bed with him. Snuggle together in the large bed that saw some of their lunchtime activities, and fall asleep wrapped in each other. Wake spooned against each other;

But those thoughts were easy to ignore for knowing that they would break this. That if he voiced them to Nigel the man would call it all off, maybe even the babysitting too. And Aiden was too fond of Brie to lose her. So the casual intimacy, the facsimile of something deeper, played out in their secret liaisons was all, and that was okay.

That was enough.

Aiden sighed as he snuggled up to Nigel's chest.

It was a Thursday lunchtime and he had just fucked Nigel so hard that he seemed to have sapped all the man's energy.

"I don't know why you're so tired." Aiden laughed. "I did all the work." He grinned, thinking of how much he'd enjoyed being buried deep within the man, fisting Nigel's cock at the same time until he came all over his chest and constricted so tightly around Aiden that his body had no choice but to cum too.

Nigel blinked, sleepy and dishevelled. "You did a great job gorgeous." His words were almost slurred with the sleepy pleasure that had descended on him.

Aiden chuckled and drew back, propping himself against Nigel's chest.

“You look so good when you’re so thoroughly fucked.” Aiden grinned, licking a hot stipe up Nigel’s neck, over his tattoo. "I want to draw you like this sometime."

“With crayons?” Nigel frowned, still sleepy.

Aiden chuckled. “No, idiot. With pencils. I’d like to sketch you… if that’s, I mean. If you’re ok with that.”

Nigel cocked a grin at him. “Like your comics?”

Aiden frowned. “You… you’ve read them?” He wasn’t sure how to feel about that, they were personal - stories of wolves that didn’t fit, running away to Romania - to the fabled pack in

Bucharest where all were welcome. He felt exposed, vulnerable at the thought of Nigel reading them.

Nigel sensed the shift and smiled warmly, pulling Aiden to his chest. “They’re really good… the way you draw wolves. It’s so beautiful.”

Aiden felt his cheeks burn, hiding his face a little against Nigel’s chest.

“You sign them with just your initials, is that a comic book thing?” Nigel seemed to be voicing an interest at the same time as steering the topic away from something he could see was difficult for Aiden. He clearly didn’t realise he’d steered into something even deeper.

Aiden hesitated, he had never shared so much of himself before, but he found that he wanted to tell Nigel this.

“I told you my dad abandoned me, well… before that, it was... My old man was an ex-Army Ranger and an addict. I mean, I didn’t know or understand this when I was little, and I didn’t understand when he told me I was gonna learn how to defend myself whether I wanted to or not. Truth is, even then, all l really wanted to do was draw, but that wasn't exactly on the agenda. He used to beat me until I couldn’t even fucking stand, he terrorised me, thinking he was making me into a stronger person, a stronger wolf. But I… I was just a fucking kid. I was Brie’s age.” The words came out in a force of emotion and he felt Nigel tense. Felt the spark of anger on his behalf.

Nigel started to stroke a hand up and down his back and Aiden let himself calm a little.

“When Hannibal brought me here, he encouraged me to draw, even taught me techniques - he’s an artist too. He helped me get my comics published, and some traditional work into a gallery. But I… I never could sign them. I’ve always been too scared that… I still, after all these years, I’m terrified that he will look for me one day. That he will find me and pick up where he left off. I can’t…” Aiden choked back a sob.

“You don’t want to sign them in case he sees the name and tracks you down.” Nigel finished for him, his tone low - somewhere between sympathy and anger.

Aiden nodded. They were silent a few minutes and it was agony. He felt raw and vulnerable, and everything he had ever had beaten into him told him it was a weakness.

As if sensing his need to change the subject, to move on from this and resume their usual levity, Nigel pulled back and gave him a lopsided grin. “Gorgeous, you can sketch me anytime! If you can make me into a fucking work of art I’m all for it.” He pulled Aiden forward and devoured his mouth hungrily despite his lethargy.

*

It felt too good. Better than it ever had with Gabi or anyone else. It felt real and powerful. And Nigel hated it.

He didn't want it to feel this good because it made it so much harder to keep Aiden at arms length - which he was determined to do for Brie's sake. She was better off with just him. He would always be there for her and he couldn't trust that someone else would be. Her own mother hadn't been.

And it wasn't just the sex - which they were having quite enough of - it was the other times in between. The times went they would snuggle against each other and talk and laugh. It felt so good to be able to talk this way with someone who was also an outsider, someone who also felt they always would be and didn't see a problem with that. He sometimes wondered that if Brie weren't in the picture or if she was older and no longer needed him - able to decide if she wanted to remain with the pack herself or not - that maybe they would run from the pack together.

It wasn't all bad with these people, and certainly the best environment for Brie. But Aiden understood how stifling and difficult it could be for a lone wolf to be part of a pack.

He mused over this as Aiden dozed beside him. They had spent most of the afternoon fucking and were both exhausted to the point that his lover had nodded off as they lay basking in the afterglow. Nigel only realised that he had nodded off too when he suddenly woke.

"Fuck!" He sat up, spilling Aiden off of him and onto the bed. "Brie will be home in twenty minutes." Nigel growled, angry at himself for being so stupid as to fall asleep.

Aiden looked at him with bleary eyes before they widened in understanding.

"Shit, I'm sorry... I..." He was out of the bed and pulling on his clothes, stumbling around a little as he got a leg in his jeans.

Nigel didn't say anything, just pulled on his own jeans and grabbed a t-shirt before heading out and down the stairs. He needed to start dinner and the kitchen was a mess. They really needed to stop fucking in the kitchen, but they just couldn't keep their hands off each other half the time.

Anger burned through him as he stomped down the stairs and started to clean up. He was angry at himself and at Aiden. This was fucking stupid that they were doing this.

"Hey, do you need help?" Aiden asked, appearing behind him at the kitchen door.

"Just leave." Nigel grunted. He shouldn't have fallen asleep. Aiden shouldn't have fallen asleep.
"I can help." Aiden insisted, that feisty note to his voice that in other circumstances Nigel loved. He turned to see the boy wearing a deep frown.

"We should cool this for a while." Nigel said at the same moment he thought it.

Aiden looked surprised and angry, almost physically reeling back with the statement.
"Because we fell asleep?" His voice was little more than a growl of displeasure.

"Because this is getting too much!" Nigel near shouted. "I just need you to fucking leave. I don't want Brie to see you here. I don't want to mix her fucking head up over this. It was a stupid idea in the first place."

"An idea that was equally yours! I never forced you into anything." Aiden did raise his voice and it got Nigel's hackles up.

"I never said you did." Nigel snarled. "But I've changed my mind. This ends now."

"Wait... ends now? What happened to cooling off?" Aiden's anger didn't mask his hurt and that made Nigel's whole body ache. The last thing he ever wanted to do was hurt someone that he...

"It ends now!" Nigel snapped, glaring at Aiden and daring him to say something, hoping that he wouldn't.

"Fine." Aiden snapped back and turned on his heel. Nigel watched him walk the hallway and let himself out the front door, surprised when he closed it behind him without slamming it.

"Fuck." Nigel grunted and leaned against the door jam. He stood for a moment trying to catch his breath and quell his anger. Trying not to fucking cry.

What the fuck did I just do?

It felt like Aiden had taken part of him out that door with him.

Even Gabi hadn’t done that.

*

It was two weeks before Aiden heard from Nigel outside of the terse and few words when he turned up to babysit Brie.

He had assumed that the schedule they had worked out for the month's shifts still stood and so had continued to turn up as usual to babysit Brie. The first time since their *breakup* Aiden had worried Nigel would send him away, but he thankfully hadn't. Nigel had started taking shifts behind the bar weeks before, and was doing well at it, so Aiden was there more than ever.

As much as he liked screwing around with Nigel - liked Nigel himself - he *loved* Brie. She had become special to him in a way he didn't realise anyone could. If Nigel had sent him away he wasn't sure what he would have done.

Instead Nigel had been polite, if gruff when they saw each other and Brie had frowned as though she noticed the change. Which she likely did, given that for weeks they had been jovial and friendly with each other, and Brie was far from stupid.

Nigel was working a lunch shift and wouldn't be home until 5pm. He and Brie had started to watch a movie. He had made them snacks and the movie was at least thirty minutes from

done when Nigel got home. Aiden had stiffened in the chair next to Brie and she had given him a quizzical look.

This sort of thing had happened often in the weeks before. Watching a movie or playing a game or finishing colouring. Something that kept Aiden there after Nigel had returned. A couple of times Nigel had joined them, sitting the other side of Brie, so the three of them could watch the end of the movie together.

But things were different now and Aiden wasn't sure if Nigel would get pissed at him if he just assumed he could stay for the end of the movie like he had before.

Nigel stepped into the living room and glanced between them and the television for a moment before smiling at Brie.

"Good movie?"

She nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah, Aiden likes it a lot too. He's going to stay and watch to the end."

Aiden's jaw clenched and his breath caught even as his heart thundered. Brie definitely had enough of an idea of what was going on to have come out with such a preemptive comment.

He could see Nigel's jaw had tightened too and they looked at each other for a moment before Brie broke the silence.

She patted the seat next to her. "You'll like it daddy, come and watch it with us. The panda knows kung fu."

Nigel hesitated for the maximum amount of time Aiden had ever seen him hesitate over anything where Brie was concerned. Which was all of a few seconds. He took off his jacket and then dropped into the sofa next to Brie. She let out a hum of contentment before snuggling into Aiden's side and stretching her legs out over Nigel's lap so he could rub her feet.

It was fucking adorable and Aiden couldn't help but laugh.

"I see how it is." Nigel rumbled, mock gruffness as he took her tiny feet into his large hands and started to tickle the souls.

"No daddy!" Brie screamed with laughter and tried to wriggle away, but Nigel had her by the ankles. She clawed at Aiden. "Help me Aiden!"

He chuckled and shook his head. "You have only yourself to blame kiddo." He grinned and started to tickle under one arm, trying to hold her squirming form in place.

"No!" She shrieked, laughing and bucking. "I surrender!"

Aiden and Nigel were laughing as they both let her go and looked at each other over the now prone and gasping form of a child recovering from a tickle fight she had no hope of winning. Their laughter died off but they remained smiling.

After a moment Aiden looked away. It was too hard to do this, to do whatever the fuck this had become. Not friends, not friends with benefits and certainly nothing more. Just two people who cared about the same child - nothing more. And that was just too hard.

"I should go." Aiden rose abruptly, spilling Brie onto the sofa. She looked up at him with confusion, and Nigel's gaze was once more impassive.

"Aiden, no, the movie is still-" she started to protest.

"Sorry kiddo. I'll see you Friday." He ruffled her hair and headed out the door before another word could be said.

That night Nigel messaged him -

~Can I see you tomorrow? I'm free lunchtime, I'd really like for us to talk.

Aiden was so incredibly tempted to ignore it, and yet he found himself replying too quickly -

~I can be at your place at midday.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Just when you think things will work out...

Nigel didn't speak for a good minute, worried that the first words out of his mouth would be - *I missed you.*

No matter how fucking true it was, he really didn't want to roll over and show his vulnerable belly. Because that was just what it felt like he would be doing. It almost made him forget about all of this. Almost.

"I'm sorry for the way I reacted. I... I need to protect Brie and-"

"I know." Aiden nodded. He leaned back against the kitchen counter with his arms folded. "I want that too. To protect her. I really care about her Nigel." He looked up and Nigel was sure there was something unsaid there, but he likely imagined it. Even so, Aiden's eyes were full of determination. "I will do anything and everything to protect her, and if that means things with us end-"

Nigel stepped forward and put his hands either side of Aiden, leaning in so their foreheads pressed together.

"I don't want that." He rumbled.

Aiden let out a sigh. "What do you want?"

Nigel had to stop himself replying the immediate response in his head - *you*.

He cleared his throat and moved back, arms still caging the boy but now a little space between them. "I liked how things were, we just needed to be more careful. I overreacted... I understand if you don't-"

The rest of his words were swallowed into Aiden's kiss, speaking of how much he had missed him. It was hungry and aggressive - like half of Aiden's wolf self was out to play. The sudden urge it gave Nigel was near overpowering as he pulled back enough to mutter -

"Shift with me."

Aiden was nodding and kissing him, pulling at his clothes as Nigel started to do the same. He didn't want to think about it too much. Wolves shifted together all the time, ran with each other. Especially pack wolves. But this wasn't what that was.

Aiden was whimpering when they had to pull apart to shed their remaining clothes. Nigel used the break to stride to the back door and open it, stepping outside in his full nudity, onto the back porch.

When he turned back Aiden had already shifted, and fuck he was beautiful as a wolf - in a way only another werewolf could appreciate. His coat was glossy and rich, and he was larger than Nigel thought he might be. But then lone wolves often were.

Nigel jumped from the edge of the porch, shifting as he went and landing as his wolfself in the garden. He had done this many times before when running with Brie at the full moon. But this was so unlike those times.

He rarely ran as a wolf during the day, and never with anyone other than Brie since long before he came to live with the pack. It conjured for him memories of his younger days as a lone wolf, hunting and running with other loners on occasion to hunt together. The thrill of it.

They were on pack land so there was no chance of getting caught by humans and the other inhabitants of the area wouldn't give them a second glance. Most wouldn't even recognise either of them as he had never shifted with the pack and he wasn't sure Aiden ever had either. It was as close to being free as they would get.

He tore through the garden, feeling Aiden at his flanks as he went, nipping playfully at him until he reached the shrubbery. Nigel slipped through and Aiden followed, as they loped their way through to the nearby woods and began to run.

It was exhilarating.

Distracting.

Aiden ran alongside him where room allowed, nipping at him, tongue lolling, as he tried to encourage Nigel to play. He growled and nipped again before racing off in the expectation of Nigel to chase him. So he did.

When he caught him Aiden gave playful yelps and they growled at each other lightly. They tousled and rolled, soft bites and digs of claws that were not painful now but would mark once they shifted back.

They chased and played in the undergrowth until they burst out into a grassy clearing and Aiden stopped to bask in the sun. He looked back at Nigel, tongue lolling and tail wagging. He was the spirit of joy in that moment and Nigel wanted to capture him and never let him go.

Nigel stalked to him and nuzzled along his flank and up to his muzzle. Nuzzling and licking until Aiden was returning the affection and whining softly.

Nigel had never done this before, not even with Gabi, and his heart was thundering. He had never done this before because it never felt right, it wasn’t just fucking.

Nigel caught Aiden's scruff in his teeth, a gentle hold and shake before releasing him. His intent was clear, he knew, before he had even realised it for himself. He wasn't sure what Aiden wanted and realised they should have probably discussed it before shifting. He also realised that he didn't mind whatever Aiden preferred, he just wanted to be close to Aiden in this way. In a way he had never been close with anyone before.

He nuzzled Aiden again and then flopped to the grass, exposing his belly and whimpering his need. Aiden snuffled against him, whining in return - desire in every note of it.

*

Aiden let the shower water wash over him.

He felt overwhelmed. His skin buzzed and he wondered how it was containing his organs. He felt sick. He realised he was trembling only a moment before he sank to the floor and sobbed.

He had never mated as a wolf before and it was… beyond anything he could have imagined. But it made everything so much harder.

"Just sex." He muttered, hearing the lie in those words from the very first time they were uttered between them. This wasn't just sex and he didn't know how it ever could be.

It didn't matter. Nigel didn't want more and he knew it was for Brie's sake. And Aiden had no plans to ever hurt that little girl.

They had shifted and mated in the woods - their wolfselves fitting together as well as they ever did in their human forms. After, they had nestled against each other in the long grass until they both napped and then woke a short time later in human form. Spooned together and wrapped in each other. Aiden's heart had wanted to burst from the way it beat in his chest. Even more so once Nigel stirred and started to caress his naked form with hands and mouth.

They had been caught in a bubble for that moment. A fantasy where this was their life as mated wolves. And Aiden let himself believe it for that moment, because he needed it. Because he thought his heart might break if he didn't. They had nuzzled and giggled and talked about getting home whilst naked. It would have been clear to any onlookers they were returning from a run and neither were so shy. But, it would certainly out their secret. He never ran with the pack and was sure Nigel never had, so people would not likely recognise them in shifted form. So they giggled some more about the clandestine nature of it all, kissed and rolled in the grass until they were about ready to take it further once more, had time not been against them. And this time Aiden was not making that mistake.

He had suggested they shift and head back, which they did. They got dressed once back in Nigel's kitchen and he said goodbye with a light kiss on the man's cheek as he started to prepare dinner for Brie.

Then he had let himself out.

Just fucking.

The words had played over and over in his mind all the way home.

Hannibal and Will were both sat in the garden, enjoying the sunny late afternoon when he returned. They had both looked at him sharply for a moment and he knew they must see it - must scent Nigel all over him. Neither said anything - Hannibal discreetly going back to reading and Will giving him a fond and encouraging smile. It only served to aggravate him and he swept passed them and up to his room. Throwing himself in the shower the moment he had his clothes off.

He stank of Nigel and grass and the woods. Things that made his heart sing, but shouldn't. He had thought this would be easier now, somehow. That after their off period he could detach from it more easily. But the opposite was certainly true. And he knew it would be the moment he agreed to shift with Nigel. He just hadn't cared because he had wanted it that much.

He sobbed into the streaming water, throat and eyes feeling raw. Heart feeling raw.

There was the temptation to run. To leave the pack and never look back. It downgraded to thoughts of messaging Nigel and saying this couldn't happen again, maybe even he should never look after Brie again. But thoughts of never seeing her again broke his heart more than anything. He was trapped in the situation because he could never do anything to hurt her.

Aiden swallowed down his sadness, reached up and turned off the water. He sat for a few more minutes in the shower before there was a knock at the door and Hannibal called through to ask if he was okay.

He answered a hurried and polite yes, and scrambled out of the shower. "I just... I went for a run, I stink."

He could hear Hannibal paused on the other side of the door as though the man were considering whether to say anything further. In the end he just replied -

"Very well. Dinner at seven." In a tone that was meant to comfort, and then Aiden heard him heading back down the stairs.

Aiden sighed his relief. If he had opened the door he knew he would end up telling Hannibal everything. And aside from not knowing how his guardian would react, he also wasn't sure how the pack alpha would react. Hannibal was pretty level headed, but he had seen that when it came to Will and other people he cared about, his emotions could compromise him. If he thought for one moment that Nigel had taken advantage of him or was using him, that at the least he should requite Aiden's feelings, Aiden wasn't sure what he might do. The idea of him throwing Nigel and Brie from the pack as Nigel feared wrenched something inside him and left him feeling winded.

He wrapped a towel around his waist then used a hand towel to dry his face. It was red and blotchy and he looked at himself in the mirror with determination.

He knew he either had to call off the *benefits* or just get the fuck over it. Completely detach and enjoy it for what it was until something changed. Until he met someone else, or Nigel did and they called it off. Until Nigel changed jobs or moved - somehow no longer needed a

sitter. Until Will told him they needed him to work more hours at the restaurant and he had to give up looking after Brie. Whatever it was that would inevitably, eventually pull them apart - he had to let himself enjoy this until then.

He huffed out a sigh, a little angry at himself. He had been detached for years. A perfect lone wolf within a pack. He could be detached again.

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Nigel looked out the cafe window and spotted Aiden immediately. His soft hair framing his beautiful face. Fuck, he was gorgeous. Nigel's heart skipped a little beat and part of him hated that. He hated that the same feeling of vulnerability that he had been stupid enough to let Gabi bring out in him was itching to reveal itself to Aiden.

They had resumed their hookups a few weeks earlier and something had changed. Not just how they veered from tender to almost aggressive with need, but how deep Aiden was burned into him. He didn't want to lose him again.

Just fucking. He had to remind himself every day in an effort not to let his feelings overwhelm him. They hadn't run as wolves again, there was no way he could without wanting more.

He needed to stay detached, as difficult as that was. He didn't want Brie to get caught up in this, he didn't want the alpha to know and maybe ostracise them for fucking his son.

The same son who he desperately wanted to wake next to. The same who sat there as Nigel dozed on sunny afternoons, sketching his nude and prone form and making him look like a fucking work of art. The one who made him laugh and smile freely for the first time in his life.

When Nigel saw Brie his heart dropped into his stomach. The way they interacted, how good Aiden was with her. Her smiling face as she looked up at him. It made him want Aiden more, knowing how happy he made her.

The thought was enough to distract Nigel for a moment from what Brie was wearing.

"The fuck." He uttered as the bell above the door rang and the pair entered the cafe, Brie bounded towards him.

"Daddy!" Brie threw herself at him like she hadn't seen him in days rather than hours whilst he'd been at an impromptu lunchtime shift at the bar. "Look what Aiden got me. For Abigail's birthday party! All the other girls will be princesses." She told him, righteous in not being a princess. He smiled and cooed over her until she slipped into the opposite side of the booth and grabbed a menu - doing her adorable grown up act.

Nigel looked up at Aiden, who was grinning. That smile shut down any and all protests Nigel wanted to have, and he found himself returning it instead as he asked-

"Really? Little Red Riding Hood?"

Aiden chuckled as he dropped into the booth next to Nigel.

“You said get her anything she wanted.”

“I meant…” Nigel’s words trailed off as they both became aware that their bodies had slid together in the booth, Aiden practically leaning against him and he had to suppress the urge to nuzzle into him. So easily, so casually. Nigel could feel the heat of his body and wanted it there, never wanted to let the boy go. He could imagine waking up beside that heat every morning, he could imagine snuggling against it in wolf form after a full moon run.

Just fucking. Nigel’s brain provided, unhelpfully. *Nothing serious. Babysitter with benefits.*

Aiden suddenly went rigid - realising their closeness. He cleared his throat and slid back out of the booth. “Hey, I… uh, I forgot something I was meant to be doing. She’s um… all yours I guess.” His smile was weak, though it grew as he looked down at Brie and ruffled her hair. “See you Saturday Little Red!”

He was out the door before Nigel could say anything. Not that he had anything to say.

*

As the weeks had passed Aiden became more and more aware of the casual intimacy that he and Nigel had fallen into. Despite having become determined to ignore it and just enjoy what they had for what it was - it was becoming difficult to ignore the glowing closeness that they both seemed happy to make no comment on.

Earlier in the week he had thought he'd blown it.

Sure, there had been times when at the house, once Brie was in bed, that Nigel got home and they curled up on the sofa together for a while before Aiden left. Certainly they were very snuggly during their lunchtime hookups - almost like a real couple. Neither of them made mention of that either - just allowed it to continue in some unspoken agreement.

But when he had automatically slid into the booth next to Nigel and practically cuddled up with the man, he worried how Nigel would feel about it. Personally, Aiden felt as torn about it as he was with everything where this was concerned. But he could imagine Nigel being unhappy with such a thing happening in public and right in front of Brie - though she seemed not to have noticed or cared.

He'd have expected a call or message from Nigel about how that had been too close for comfort - maybe saying they should cool it for a while again. But he didn't.

And so Aiden went as planned to collect Brie from the birthday party the following Saturday. Nigel had dropped her before his shift and now Aiden would have her until Nigel finished his shift after midnight.

When he arrived at Abigail's house he was surprised to see Brie sitting along on the veranda whilst all the other children ran around playing.

"What's up Red?" Aiden smiled at her. When she looked up at him she looked like she was about to crumble. He crouched down and she flung herself into his arms.

"I want to go home." She half sobbed.

"Sure." Aiden agreed immediately and stood as she latched onto him like a limpet. He sought Abigail's mum in the crowd and she gave him a concerned look and a shrug. His heart ached wondering how long she had sat there waiting to leave. She'd had playdates with Abigail before, they were friends and Brie was a social child - much more comfortable in a pack than her father. Something really must have upset her.

He walked with her out to the street and started for Nigel's house.

"What happened Brie? Why are you sad?"

She clung to him even more tightly, causing him to cough a little at the constriction.

"Marissa is a liar." Brie finally voiced the indignant words.

"What did Marissa say?"

They got to the end of the block and turned, Nigel's house only a few doors down and Brie just snuggled into him all the tighter. When they finally reached the stoop, Aiden set her down to get out the spare key Nigel had given him weeks before.

He stole a glance at Brie and she looked as miserable as he had ever seen her, more so.

“What did she say?” Aiden asked again, kneeling in front of her.

She let out a little sob before replying - “She called me a liar. But she’s the liar!”

“Why would she do that?” Aiden asked, brow furrowed.

“Abigail asked if I would get a new mommy and I said no because I already had a new daddy. Marissa said I was lying and that you don’t live here so you can’t be my new daddy because families live together.” Every word came out on a strangled sob and Aiden’s blood ran cold.

“Brie…” Aiden rubbed his hands up and down her arms in an attempt to comfort with no real idea what to say.

She looked at him sternly through red-rimmed eyes.

“I’ve seen you kissing and cuddling on the sofa. That’s what people do when they are a couple and-”

“Brie.” Aiden cut her off with a gentle tone. “Sometimes… when two adults are friends…” He had no idea how to find the words.

“You love daddy, I know you do. And he loves you.” She accused, her bottom lip trembling.

Just fucking.

He had no idea how to handle this or how to ever explain it to Brie… or to Nigel. And… it wasn't like it was easy to deny any of it - he wasn't keen on lying to a child.

"Brie… sweetheart…"

"I'm not a liar." She stamped her foot as her face scrunched into an angry pout.

And then she trembled and the look of anxious fear that crossed her face was something Aiden knew well.

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Brie took off before Aiden had finished thinking through how the fuck he was going to explain any of this to Nigel. By the time he got to his feet and went after her she had run down the side of the house and into the backyard. And then she was gone - nothing but the shrubbery shaking to signal her direction.

He knew there was no point calling after her, she would be panicked. Terrified. He knew because he had been there himself when he was around the same age. Flight - always flight for the vulnerable. Brie was a feisty little kid, but her wolfself knew how vulnerable and small she was in every sense to the pack. It was what was driving her now.

Whatever had triggered her shift - Marissa's taunts, Brie's ideas and the thought they might not be true? It didn't matter now. All that mattered was keeping a tiny, scared cub safe.

Aiden started stripping his shirt as he made for the shrubs. By the time he got to them he had pulled down his jeans. The remaining clothes - his undershirt and underwear - fell away in shreds as he shifted. He didn't miss a beat as he took off through the foliage on the trail of Brie's scent.

He was able to track her easily, but didn't want to spook her, taking ever decreasing circles around the area where she had finally stopped, exhausted. Eventually he loped slowly towards her hiding spot next to a log. She was huddled surrounded by the clothes she had been wearing, now a tiny cub swamped by them. She whined pitifully.

He returned the whine and huffed at her, trying to put her at ease as he dropped and nestled into her. She shivered but relaxed against him, letting his much larger body circle around her and keep her safe.

*

Nigel was going out of his fucking mind.

The party finished hours ago, and he had returned from work nearly forty minutes earlier to no sign of Aiden or Brie.

Abigail's place was just around the block. There was no note, no text. Nothing from Aiden to say where they had gone because they certainly weren't in the fucking house!

His anger turned quickly to dread. Aiden wasn't irresponsible, and he would do everything in his power to protect Brie, he knew that. Aiden loved her like his own.

The thought felt like a punch in the chest and his mind reeled to possibilities. Had there been some sort of accident on the way home? Had they been knocked down? What if... What if Gabi had decided to come back for Brie after all this time? What if she had taken her and Aiden had gone after them?

No. No that couldn't be. Aiden would have tried to contact him. Something terrible must have happened if Aiden hadn't contacted him.

He picked up his phone with a shaky hand and called the Lecter house.

"Lecter residence. Can I help you?" It was a light, feminine voice that Nigel figured to be the housekeeper or something.

"I need to talk to the alpha... right now. It's an emergency."

"I'm afraid Doctor Lecter is still at the restaurant at the moment. Can I-" She paused for a moment and then continued. "I'll pass you to Mr Graham."

There was a shuffling noise and then Will Graham, the alpha's mate, was on the phone.

"Hello?" He sounded sleepy.

"Hi, this is Nigel Ibanescu. Is Aiden there? Is he there with Brie?"

"No, they aren't here. What's happened Nigel? It's late-"

"I fucking know it's late. I got home from work and Aiden and Brie aren't here. No note, no calls. I-"

"I'm coming over. I'll be there in ten minutes."

Nigel was shaking with upset and anger as he lowered the phone from his ear.

He couldn't lose Brie. He couldn't. It would kill him and...

He couldn't lose Aiden either.

Nigel made another sweep of the house whilst he waited for Will Graham. It looked like they hadn't even come home from the party. Brie's pyjamas were still on her bed and her party clothes weren't in the hamper. Nigel made his way back down and into the kitchen - no signs of life there at all. Just his own coffee cup sat on the sink from before he left for work.

He had just moved out into the backyard when he heard the car pull up outside and called around the side of the house. "Around here."

Will Graham sprinted through and caught up to him just as he found the clothes. Nigel crouched. Aiden's clothes, some removed, some torn. Like he shifted in a hurry. He turned

and held them up to Will.

"He shifted."

Will sniffed the air. "I need to shift to scent him. Hannibal could-"

"My kid is missing, I don't have time to wait for your boyfriend." Nigel started to remove his boots and then his jeans. He sniffed the air. "They are out there, I can scent them both... I think I can follow the trail."

In human form, wolves usually could only scent family and close friends. He didn't want to think about the fact that he could, obviously, scent Aiden. He was just glad that Will chose not to acknowledge it only replying-

"I'll come with you." he started to remove his own clothes. Nigel gave a curt nod and shifted. The scent was immediately much more rich and distinguishable - he followed it, only having to pause for the moment when Will Graham shifted and his scent his Nigel's nose.

After filtering Will out, Nigel was able to track through the undergrowth and then into the woods. He took off at an easy lope, Will slightly back from him and downwind as Nigel tracked. Brie's scent was strongest but he could pick up the circles Aiden took, Brie clearly at their centre.

Aiden and Brie were snuggled together in a tight ball by a log. They both appeared fine, but sleeping. There was no tang of blood in the air, no scent of fear. Just calm as they breathed together.

As Nigel and Will approached Aiden's eyes opened and his tail wagged twice. But he didn't move, obviously not wanting to wake Brie.

What the fuck had happened? Why had Brie shifted? Why hadn't Aiden let him know?

His mind was filled with thoughts of Aiden as a youngster, living as a wolf. It was fucking madness - staying shifted in one form too long drove you insane, not just feral but… wrong. The thought of losing Brie to the madness of a perpetual wolf form made him feel sick.

In this form the anger and frustration presented in his hackles rising, which caused Aiden to cower briefly before his own did the same in response.

Brie, sensing it, whimpered. Her eyes blinking open. She whined, realising her situation and immediately Nigel could scent her unhappiness. Though she wasn't scared. She snuggled against Aiden and looked up at him. Nigel stepped forward and lowered his muzzle to her, nuzzling her until she gave a playful yap. Aiden's tongue lolled in response and Nigel nuzzled him for a moment too.

Will let out a huff behind them and Nigel turned to look, trying to imagine how this might look to him - because it looked like a fucking family, that much Nigel knew.

Nigel's heart ached at the thought.

He took hold of Brie with a soft mouth and started back towards the house at a gentle stride.

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Aiden hung back with Will once they reached the house. Nigel shifted back and put on his jeans before scooping up Brie's tiny wolf form and carrying her into the house.

Once Will and Aiden had shifted and dressed they let themselves in the open back door and waited in the kitchen. They were silent for a few minutes before Will inevitable asked-

"Are you and Nigel together?" There was nothing but curiosity in his tone.

"Don't say anything to Hannibal..."

Will laughed. "I won't." Will's laugh subsided and he cocked his head. "You're worried about him knowing?"

Aiden shrugged. "Nigel is... Or, well. He, he's worried that if Hannibal knows and does have a problem with it that Nigel might lose his place in the pack."

Will looked slightly taken aback, and Aiden knew exactly why. The pack alpha could be stern and strict for the sake of the pack, but they also knew him to be kind, soft-hearted, fair. He equally knew that he loved Brie enough himself to know why Nigel couldn't ever risk it.

"It doesn't matter." Aiden shook his head and looked away, going to the sink to pour them both glasses of water. "It isn't anything serious. We're not a couple." He handed Will a glass. "It's just sex."

Will quirked a brow but clearly decided not to say anything further and instead drank down his water.

"What happened tonight? Hannibal will scent that I shifted and I'm not going to lie to him."

Aiden nodded. "Brie was upset - just some kids being shits. She shifted and I went after her, managed to calm her down. I realised she probably wasn't going to shift back until Nigel got her, so I just waited. Let her sleep - she was exhausted and-"

"And it didn't fucking occur to you to just bring her home?" Nigel interrupted from the doorway.

"Hey now, Aiden-" Will started to protest but Nigel glared at him and snapped-

"Is her fucking babysitter. He should have taken better care of her."

"What did you want me to do Nigel?" Aiden raised his voice a little and then lowered it, thinking of Brie in her bed. "I couldn't have stopped her shifting so I went with her, kept her safe and calm. If she hadn't shifted back by the time she woke, I would have carried her home."

"I was worried out of my mind!" Nigel growled.

Aiden stepped forward tentatively. "So was I... About Brie, about you. I... You know you could trust me to look after her. You know how much I love her... don't you?" Aiden reached out and placed a hand on Nigel's arm. He felt the skin shiver and the muscle harden before relaxing.

Nigel shook his head, his expression seemed torn between anger, hurt and... something altogether more frightening and perfect.

"I'm going to go lay down with Brie until she shifts back. I think you should leave." Nigel said.

Aiden nodded even as his heart broke. He wasn't sure what he had expected, what he had thought he'd seen in Nigel's eyes. But somewhere inside there was an image of them snuggling on the sofa together, teasing Brie until she was giggling between them. Somewhere that image was shattering into tiny pieces even as he knew he'd had no right to expect anything different.

"I'll drive us home." Will put his hand on Aiden's shoulder and guided him out of the house - the whole thing a blur.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The pack alpha has his say, as does the indignant small child.

Chapter Notes

Ahhhhh so sorry. I was meant to post this last night but got caught up in trying to finish another fic and totally forgot. Hope everyone has a good weekend!

Hannibal stood in the kitchen, looking as though he'd been pacing. He looked at Will as they entered, concern but also relief, clearly he'd been worried for his mate. Will had worn the same expression all the way home and had seemed almost anxious - as though on the verge of reprimanding Aiden in some way.

"I got your message, is everything ok?" Hannibal asked as he and Will moved together in that perfect synchronicity they had - their bodies smoothly easing together until they were in a comfortable half embrace.

Will returned Hannibal's fond look before turning to Aiden as he answered "Brie Ibanescu shifted. She's alright, Aiden looked after her but…" He looked back to the pack alpha. "Hannibal, tell him."

"Tell me what?" Aiden was surprised by Will's words, but then took in the look between his parents.

Aiden's whole body heated at the sudden realisation that something was going on. Was he about to be reprimanded? Asked to leave? Will must have known something was going on between him and Nigel - was this some kind of weird pack test?

"I am sure you did a good job of looking after Brie." Hannibal started softly and Will nudged him as he frowned. "I knew you would. Please, Aiden… don't fret unduly over this." Hannibal's tone and gaze softened. "I asked you to look after her precisely because this was bound to happen sooner or later, and you would be the best person in the pack to help her through it. Perhaps tomorrow morning you should return to their house and spend some time with her, make sure she is happy and settled? You know more than anyone what it is like to shift at that age - and now out of phase with the moon. She will need you. Let her know she is safe and that she didn't do anything wrong."

Aiden considered the words but was already slowly shaking his head. “I don’t…. I’m not welcome back there.”

“Hannibal.” Will admonished, his tone firm now. “Tell him.”

“What’s going on?” Aiden’s tone was one of gruff frustration.

Hannibal cleared his throat. “I may have wanted you to be involved with Brie for more than just the fact that you would be her best comfort and guide in this pack. I thought that… that you and Nigel Ibanescu would be well suited.”

The room went silent and Aiden looked at his guardians in disbelief.

“You were trying to set us up?”

“Not specifically.” Hannibal countered, stepping forward. “In your own ways you are both great assets to the pack. And I know you are both more likely to stay if you have something - someone - to stay for. But-"

"It's ok if you don't want that." Will cut in, presumably before Hannibal could dig a larger hole for himself. He let out a heavy sigh and then rested a reassuring hand on Aiden's shoulder. "It was just an idea, neither of us thought... Aiden, it's ok that you're mad. It was wrong of Hannibal to meddle." He shot his husband a look. "And it's ok if you don't feel that way if... but look, it's also okay if you're in love with him."

Aiden couldn't help the sharp sob that accompanied the even shaper pain in his chest. He shrugged out of Will's grasp.

“It sounds like a fucking business deal!” Aiden near shouted in his exasperation.

“Aiden…” Will’s tone was near admonishment and Aiden half expected the man to tell him to calm down.

“You couldn’t have just said, hey there’s this nice guy we think you might hit it off with? Maybe even mention it to him too? Because he’s spent months fretting that you might find out that we’re fucking and throw him out of the pack.”

Aiden only realised how loud he had raised his voice when he stopped to a ringing silence as the three of them stared at each other.

“It’s more than fucking.” Will said quietly, giving Aiden a sympathetic look that pulled the boy’s chest tight and made his throat constrict.

“Not for Nigel.” He managed to croak. "I never asked for this. This isn't okay. You can't..." Words became difficult as his throat constricted around them. Instead he grit his teeth and turned on his heel, and took off up the stairs.

He had never felt more petulant than the moment he slammed his bedroom door behind him. It gave him a flash - a thought rather than a memory - of what it would have been to be petulant as a teen. To be a normal kid who was raised by a loving family or in a good pack.

Safe and secure and there for him when he started to shift so young. He hadn't had that, and even when he had - those first few years with Hannibal and Will - he had still been guarded and wary. He had never had that kind of normality that so many others in the pack had had - that Brie could have.

His heart ached at the thought of her. Of all the things he wanted for her, not least of which was the continuation of the little unit they had accidentally become.

He choked back a sob and grabbed his backpack from the wardrobe. It was the beat up one that had been with him on the streets. Too good, sturdy and practical to throw out, though it had been through the wash a few times. He started shoving clothes into it as he forced down the tears.

He couldn't stay. It was just too difficult. This life was never meant for him - he was a lone wolf regardless of anything. He didn't belong in a pack, he certainly didn't belong in the family of the pack alpha.

The thought that where he really did belong was with other lone wolves, like Nigel, hurt him deep to his core. He didn't know if Nigel liked him, if he maybe even loved him. He only knew that Nigel didn't want him - and he had no defense against that. Everything Nigel did was for Brie, and if he felt Brie was better off without Aiden in her life, in her family, then he had no way to argue against that.

He should never have come to this place, never moved in with the pack. Hannibal should have left him to go wild and mad - live out his life as a wolf.

He grabbed some toiletries, knowing from experience the luxury they were to have on the streets. Not that he would likely be on the streets long, enough to find his way back to some good woods. Somewhere he could live as shifted as possible. He wasn't even sure he cared about shifting back - he could go feral and maybe be happy like that. Even if it would eventually drive him mad.

He packed a few last items before picking up his sketchbook from the desk. It fell open to the most recent sketch - one page of Brie smiling when he had taken her to the park and sketched her as she played, the facing page of Nigel sleeping.

Everything threatened to overwhelm him in that moment, and he wondered if it might be easier just to shift now and be done with it. Leave this life and the human world behind. He threw the book across the room, a few pages falling from it as it hit the door and he suppressed the urge to scream.

He should never have come here and tried to have this life.

He grabbed the backpack and his thick jacket before running back down the stairs, leaving the front door swinging as he went through it and jumped into his beat up truck. He screeched out of the driveway and was out on the road - the house shrinking in the distance as he sped away.

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"Daddy." Brie sobbed.

"I'm here baby." Nigel moved from where he had been reading in the window seat and went straight to Brie's side, sitting on her bed and letting her snuggle into him as her little body shook.

"I shifted." She mumbled through soft tears.

He stroked her back. "Yeah, you did. You're okay now. Did something upset you baby?"

He felt her nod against him, and rather than reply further to that she instead asked - "Where's Aiden?"

Nigel stiffened.

Gone. He wanted to tell her that, that Aiden would never be back because this was just too hard. He couldn't have Aiden in his life and not have more. Aiden couldn't just be Brie's babysitter, but there was no other choice because he would never put Brie at risk of getting close to someone and losing them again - like her mother. Never risk losing the support of the alpha.

"He... He isn't going to come around any more." Nigel said, tying to work out how to explain more than that.

Brie straightened and sat back from him, glaring at him through her red rimmed eyes.

"No daddy! Go get him right now."

Nigel felt like he'd been punched in the gut. How did you tell a child the world just didn't work that way?

"I can't baby. He-"

"No daddy!" If she had been standing she would have stamped a foot. Her face was red with the indignation of a five year old. "You sent him away, I know you did. You bring him back!" She folded her arms.

"What..." Nigel's heart was pounding and he wondered for a minute if it were a dream. "He-"

"NO DADDY!" She shouted at him, her face red. "You think that you shouldn't be boyfriends because of me. I'm not stupid! I can see and hear you! Marissa said you aren't boyfriends and I know she's wrong. Because I know he loves you and I know you love him. And I don't want you to send him away."

Her anger was righteous and it was only that fact that seemed to be holding back the threatening tears.

"That's not... Baby, I just..." Maybe he did have to explain given that Brie seemed to know a damn sight more than he had given her credit for. "I don't want you to get hurt. I don't want you to care about someone and them leave."

"But I do care about Aiden." She wailed, slamming her hands onto the bed. "And he cares about us!"

"And what happens when he leaves like your mother did?" Nigel growled, hardly able to stop the words and then feeling a pang of hatred at himself for them.

Brie looked confused. Not stunned as she may well have done, but then she narrowed her eyes and understood. "If he leaves then I will be sad because I love him. You can't tell him to go just because you will be sad if he said he was going to leave. You can't tell him to go just because you were sad when mommy left. That doesn't even make sense daddy!" She reprimanded him and it felt like a slap in the face.

His eyes were stinging and it took every little bit of control not to break down right there in front of her.

"You love him daddy." She said quietly, head bowed as she sniffled again, her fury having passed. "And so do I." She snuggled against him again. "Please don't send him away."

*

"Nigel, this is Hannibal Lecter."

Nigel's heart skipped a beat. He had finally managed to get Brie settled in front of the TV with a glass of milk and a sandwich - trying to replenish her energy from the shift - whilst he tried to decide what to do about Aiden.

The last thing he had expected was a call from the pack alpha and Aiden's guardian.

"What can I do for you?" Nigel replied, somewhere between gruff and worried. He hoped to hell this wasn't the call he dreaded -

Keep away from my son, leave the pack.

"Aiden has gone... he... He was upset. Will told me you were able to scent him without shifting? I need you to find him for me." An all business tone, but the concern was unmistakable beneath that.

Nigel felt a surge of concern but it was quickly tempered with anger. “Maybe he doesn’t want to be found.” Nigel growled and then hung up.

He paced the kitchen for a good minute - completely torn. He wanted to go after Aiden and find him, bring him back and tell him he belongs with him and Brie. But he couldn’t do it, couldn’t choose Aiden’s life for him - if he wanted to go then he wanted to go.

Nigel understood it. If not for Brie he’d go back to being a lone wolf himself. And after everything…

He wasn’t dumb to the fact that he was a factor here. They’d been messing each other around, they hadn’t really discussed it. And he hadn’t been honest. He never told Aiden how much he

really meant to him. Never explained that this was his own fucking insecurities that even his five year old daughter seemed to be able to see, that kept him from allowing more.

He couldn't fuck up the boy's life even more by chasing after him and causing more upset. For all he knew Aiden wasn't even interested in more than fucking, as much as his whole body and soul screamed sorrow at the idea.

Nigel stopped pacing and set his phone on the kitchen table before going back in to sit with Brie.

*

It was late, fully dark, by the time Aiden pulled over. He was just on the edge of pack territory and so the road would be safe even if it was in the middle of nowhere. He'd blanked his mind listening to loud music, but now he'd stopped the engine and tried to hunker down comfortably in his seat, his mind started racing. But he needed to rest, he'd driven all through the day, mostly in circles - still not so far from home. If it had ever been that.

He pulled out his phone without really knowing why. He dismissed the missed calls and messages from Hannibal and Will, unsure whether he would ever listen to them. He wanted to, he felt that tug, but he was still too angry, and he couldn't fool himself into thinking it would work out. He'd intruded on their lives too long.

Same went for Nigel. Difference was, Nigel had clearly already realised that. Already pushed him away.

He played his phone over in his hands as he lay back in his seat.

He didn't realise how long he'd been staring at his phone until the glare of it hurt his eyes now that all around him was pitch darkness. Thoughts of Nigel lead inevitably to thoughts of Brie and he knew he wouldn't sleep, couldn't fully leave, until he knew she was really alright. He took a breath, clenching his jaw at the thought of his last interaction with Nigel -

~I know you maybe don't want to talk to me, but can you at least tell me if Brie is alright?"

He only had to wait a few minutes for the reply -

~She's fine. A little clingy, but otherwise okay.

Aiden sat up and tapped his phone against his thigh, unsure what to say now the lines of communication may have reopened.

Finally he settled on just leading with the facts.

~Will and Hannibal know about us. Hannibal says he had intended it all along. He wanted to match make us. I just thought you should know. So you know you aren't going to get kicked out over this. I thought you should know.

There was a longer pause, Aiden started to think Nigel wasn't going to reply at all. Instead when the message pinged, Aiden frowned -

~Where are you darling?

*

Midnight came and went. By the time 3am approached, Nigel considered going to bed.

Giving up.

Because he would if that was what Aiden wanted. He had realised the moment Aiden had text him that he would do whatever it was that Aiden wanted. He wasn't going to beg, wasn't going to put that on the boy.

He just hoped…

The knock at the door was light and for a moment Nigel thought he'd imagined it. The second knock was barely louder but it had him out of his seat. Nigel moved quickly but quietly to the door, his heart hammering as he opened it.

Aiden stood the otherside. Of course. It couldn't have been anyone but him and yet Nigel was still a little surprised. When he'd sent the text and Aiden had replied he was leaving town, Nigel had simply responded - "I'd have liked the chance to say goodbye."

And now here he was and Nigel hoped it wasn't just goodbye.

Aiden's eyes were red, he looked drawn and exhausted.

"I just-" Aiden started, but Nigel cut him off - grabbing him more roughly than intended and pulling him into a tight embrace. He clutched harder as he felt Aiden sink into him.

"If you want to go I won't stop you, this can be goodbye…"

"You wouldn't have chased after me would you?" Aiden asked, no emotion to his voice.

Nigel let out a heavy sigh and pressed a kiss to the boy's mop of hair. "No… If, if you wanted to leave, I wouldn't pressure you to stay. You have your own mind, who am I to try and make it up for you? You're a wolf, you're free."

Aiden pulled back and looked at him, studying his face as a smile began to tweak the corners of his mouth. "That's why I came back."

Nigel let out the breath he didn't realise he had been holding. It came as a sigh of relief and he felt warmth spread in his chest as he exhaled. A low chuckle rumbled out of him before he pulled Aiden close again, moving as he did so to close the door softly behind him. They had turned, he had his back to the door as he rested against it, letting Aiden press against him.

With little effort they both turned into each other's necks, taking in each other's scent. Aiden smelled of car fuel and the woods he had once ran with him in. Those woods where they had

mated as wolves…

Nigel's heart thundered.

"I love you." He breathed the words against Aiden's skin. "But I would never make you stay."

Aiden chuckled and he felt his hot breath huff against his neck, followed by the soft press of dry lips.

"I ran because I don't want people meddling in my life. And because… it was my instinct to run and be in control, away from a pack. But just as strong was the instinct to stay… with you and Brie. And that terrified me." Aiden was shaking as he spoke and Nigel pulled him ever tighter. "I ran because I thought… I never thought you would…"

Nigel shook his head. "I thought… I thought I was doing the right thing by Brie. Turns out I'm nowhere near as smart as a five year old."

Aiden pulled back, grinning. "I could have told you that." He chuckled.

"Hey, you little-" His growled words were cut off by Aiden kissing him. His arms came up around Nigel's neck and he had no resistance as Aiden deepened the kiss.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

A happy ending for Aiden, Nigel and Brie

They went up to Nigel's room and kissed. Nothing more than that at first.

Brie was sleeping soundly in her room, but even so this needed to be something beyond sex. It *was* something beyond sex, regardless of how they might have both tried to fight that.

Aiden had stripped out of his jacket, but they were otherwise fully clothed when they collapsed onto the bed, kissing and touching. Taking in each others scent and marking each other in kind.

It was more intimate than Nigel had ever been with anyone in his life and he was desperate for it. Felt a desperate need to connect with Aiden like that day they had in the woods. That run that had spoken of the truth between them.

"I meant what I said… I won't make you stay. But if there is anything I can do to show you how much…" Nigel breathed the words next to Aiden's neck as they clung together.

"And if I asked you to leave with me? You and Brie." Aiden replied cautiously.

Nigel was swamped with immediate emotion - the hope those words gave him, the need he had within him but even so he started to shake his head at the thought of Brie and her safety not absolutely coming first.

Aiden cut him off with another kiss before he could answer, pulling back to hold Nigel's face in his hands. "I'll stay… here with you. If that's okay? I… I wanted this to be real, on some level I wished for it, so what right do I have to wish you away now?"

Nigel grinned, stupidly. He wanted to laugh and cry all at once. He surged forward and pressed against Aiden's lips again, peppering him with kisses as he said "I meant what I said… I love you. I'm in love with you." The words started to come out in a rush as Aiden's smile grew wider and wider in receipt of them. "I think I've been in love with you since that first night I met you. When bandaged my hands… I.... I wanted to believe it was nothing more than lust for so long-"

Aiden was shaking his head and chuckling, pushing Nigel back. "I'm in love with you too." His expression grew serious and stumbled over his words - "Do you think I would have ever, if I didn't love you, do you really think I'd have… I… I wouldn't have. When we mated in wolf form, I wouldn't have if I didn't love you."

Nigel eased them back onto the bed gently, pulling Aiden into his arms and kissing him slowly until they were too tired to kiss anymore. They fell asleep wrapped in each other.

*

Nigel woke with the sun at some ungodly hour which Brie wouldn't even get up for. He groaned when he realised he had forgotten to close the curtains in his east-facing room.

The groan died in his throat as a warm body snuggled into his side in response.

Aiden.

Nigel surged forward until he had Aiden under him, pressed to the bed. He enjoyed the feeling of Aiden waking and stretching against him as he buried his face at the boy's neck.

"Worried I might leave?" Aiden chuckled "you don't need to keep me pinned to the bed."

Nigel exhaled a long sigh of hot air against Aiden's flesh, causing him to shudder slightly. A sensation that evoked a similar response in Nigel.

"I've longed to wake up like this. So many times, I've dreamt of waking next to you." Nigel muttered the words against Aiden's neck, croaking them almost. His throat was tight with emotion.

Aiden gently ran his hands up Nigel's back.

"I know. I did too… I don't." He felt Aiden shake his head next to him, the boy's curly hair tickling him. "After everything, it just seems so stupid that we didn't let this happen. Didn't let ourselves have this." The words were tinged with sadness despite the light chuckle that followed.

Nigel huffed and smiled. He drew back and looked down at Aiden's wide and sparkling eyes. "If I had known what an asshole the alpha is-"

His words were cut off my Aiden laughing and pulling him down into a kiss.

It didn't matter. None of it did now. What was done was done, and the fact was they had been tried and tested and were stronger for it. As he deepened the kiss, Nigel felt whole. Unbreakable. He felt like he and Aiden really could be something together and nothing was going to stop that now.

*

Aiden moaned into this kiss, shifting under Nigel so that his legs fell open and Nigel slotted between them. Even through the clothes they had slept in, the feel of their cocks hardening against each other was clear.

It had Aiden panting even before Nigel started to rock, grinding their crotches together with a delicious friction.

After a few minutes Aiden broke the kiss with a laugh. “Stop…” He urged, his hands on Nigel’s hips. “I don’t want to cum in my pants.”

“I’ll do your laundry later.” Nigel growled against his mouth before nipping at his lower lip. Aiden moaned again. It was tempting just to let Nigel continue but he hadn’t brought enough clothes with him to get these messed up. He knew that he’d have to go back to Hannibal and Will at some point - even if just to grab a few things and let them know he was okay. But he didn’t want that to be any time soon. He didn’t want to not be with Nigel and Brie.

“Nigel…. Just take off your fucking clothes.” Aiden growled back before nipping at Nigel’s lips in turn. He moved his mouth across Nigel’s jaw, sucking kisses and nibbling at his stubble until he reached his ear and whispered - “I want to fuck you.”

He felt Nigel shudder and his cock twitched in response. The thought of having Nigel like that again - the way Nigel had wanted to be taken when they were their wolf selves - had his mind already racing ahead. He shoved Nigel back, the man going willingly back on his haunches and scrambling to strip himself. Aiden shuffled to sitting and started doing the same.

Their undressing was hindered as they kept falling into more kisses. Into biting gently at each part of revealed flesh as clothes fell away. They were both hard and leaking by the time they were shoving off their underwear and spilling the clothes from the bed to the floor.

Nigel pressed forward again then, putting Aiden flat on his back as he nipped and sucked his neck and down to his chest. Aiden panted, putting his hands in Nigel’s hair and gripping it lightly as Nigel’s mouth worked over his right nipple.

“Tell me what you want Nigel.” Aiden murmured breathlessly.

“I want you to mate with me.” Nigel growled the words against goosebumped flesh.

Aiden trembled. He had expected Nigel to ask to be fucked, but to be mated? It was no different than when they had been wolves - but they had somehow managed to deny the significance of that. To brush it off as their nature taking over rather than the truth of their feelings.

The act was still the same. Sex, either way, but the words - there was a power in them. A commitment. And a question.

Did Aiden want to be Nigel’s mate?

Aiden growled and surged up, rolling them so that he had Nigel pinned on his back, wrists pressed above his head. He leaned in and kissed him, hungry and deep.

“Yes.” He breathed the word into Nigel’s mouth and received a moan in return.

They were quiet then. There had been very little noise already, but both conscious of not being alone in the house, they were considerate with every movement.

Aiden allowed Nigel to sit, resulting in him sitting in Nigel's lap as he turned and carefully opened the bedside drawer. He pulled out the lube and a condom before spilling Aiden off of his lap.

Aiden licked his lips as Nigel passed him the items and then lay down on his front, a crackle of anticipation between them.

The idea of mounting Nigel, in either form, made him ache. He loved when Nigel fucked him, loved everything they had explored together, but the way Nigel looked back over his shoulder at him spoke of more. This wasn't just pleasure and fun. This certainly wasn't sneaking around like fools. This wasn't babysitter with benefits. It was a consummation.

Aiden ran his hand gently over Nigel's rump, Nigel arching into the touch. It was a beautiful sight that made Aiden's breath leave him with a shudder.

He swallowed and pulled back, squeezing some lube onto his fingers before dripping some of the cool liquid between Nigel's cheeks. Nigel arched again, letting out a little gasp as he did so. It made Aiden's heart race all the more, and that was enough to move him forward. He pressed two lubed fingers to Nigel and began to massage him, feeling the man relax beneath his fingers and slowly let him in. One finger at first, before he added more lube and another finger.

By the time he got to three fingers, Nigel was alternating between moaning and whimpering. "You feel so… I…" His words were panted out and he couldn't finish a sentence as Aiden's fingers grazed over his prostate every time he tried.

Nigel pushed back on his fingers with a grunt. "Mate me." The words came out hard, though not quite a demand or a plea.

Nigel groaned as Aiden pulled his fingers out to roll on the condom. He lubed himself as he moved behind Nigel, spilling some more on his fingers and pushing that inside Nigel before drawing his fingers out again. He pressed his cock to Nigel and took a few calming breaths before pushing in.

Nigel muffled a cry into the pillow as Aiden slowly slid in until he bottomed out. He stopped, panting as he looked down to see his cock fully buried in his lover. It twitched and Nigel let out another moan into the pillow.

"Please…" The word was drawn out on a moan and Aiden took it as a prompt, slowly beginning to fuck in and out of Nigel. Aiden placed one hand on Nigel's lower back and stroked the other up and down Nigel's thigh as he began to pump into him. The snap of his hips was still gentle and slow. He pressed his hand on Nigel's back until he started to lower to the bed. Aiden went with him, covering his back.

The pace remained slow, quiet. Now laying practically flat to the bed, with one leg hitched up, Nigel had pulled the pillow as he moved - ready to stifle any cries. He let out soft grunts as Aiden slowly moved, his hand pressed to Nigel's chest.

Aiden had barely any traction, laying as he was, and that was just fine. He rocked into Nigel, panting against his back and sucking kisses into his shoulder as they moved together.

The build to his climax was slow and pleasurably torturous. Aiden's hand trailed down from Nigel's chest to his cock, gripping it gently. He tunnelled his fist and let his own movements push Nigel into his hand over and over until Nigel was practically writhing.

Nigel's orgasm seemed to surprise them both. One moment he was moaning into the pillow and the next his whole body shuddered and he spilled hot and wet into Aiden's hand. Aiden stifled a cry against Nigel's back as his inner muscles squeezed. He continued to press into the tightening channel until he was shuddering too. His whole body spasming as he spent himself deep inside Nigel.

The lay, breathless and boneless. Neither spoke. Aiden trailed his fingers through the sheen of sweat over Nigel's back. Nigel's hand came round to find purchase, pulling Aiden closer to him so that he couldn't pull out.

Aiden let out a contented hum as he slowly drifted back into an exhausted doze - his cock still twitching it's final efforts inside Nigel.

*

Aiden woke alone, but could hear from the sound of the radio, happy chattering and smell of breakfast, that the rest of the house was up. He snuck out to the bathroom and washed up before pulling his clothes back on and making himself presentable.

When Aiden went down to breakfast he found Brie already sat the kitchen table, swinging her legs and grinning from ear to ear as Nigel flipped pancakes.

She didn't look remotely surprised that he had spent the night, instead telling him knowingly - "Daddy's making pancakes." As though that explained something - everything.

He looked over at Nigel who continued to concentrate on his cooking, though a slight blush rose on his cheeks.

"Are you going to live with us now?" Brie asked, still smiling. Still swinging her legs. Still looking like the cat who got the cream.

Aiden felt his own blush at that and stammered over his words. "Oh, I uh... I don't... um..." He had no idea how much of what they had said last night held weight, and neither wanted to presume Nigel's thoughts on it, or say anything that could mislead Brie given they hadn't discussed what to tell her.

"Aiden is always welcome here baby. And-" Nigel started as he served her the first pancake - complete with bananas and blueberries.

"You should live with us!" She directed excitedly at Aiden, cutting off Nigel midflow. He felt his colour rise even further. "I told Marissa you were really boyfriends." she singsonged.

"Brie." There was a light warning in Nigel's tone and she stopped swinging her legs, looking up at him with a worried frown.

"We... uh, we are boyfriends." Aiden interjected.

Brie squealed and Aiden's eyes went immediately to Nigel, who had clearly been as concerned about him of stepping over some line. Nigel's expression softened into a smile, and he stepped towards Aiden. Aiden took a step too, closing the space until they fell into a side on hug next to the table. Brie was grinning all the more at them as they smiled at each other.

"I meant everything I said last night." Aiden said. "I hope you did too."

Nigel huffed a laugh. "Yeah. Yeah I really did."

"I knew today was going to be special!" Brie shouted excitedly, her pancake still untouched. "Daddy only makes pancakes for breakfast on special occasions!"

Nigel scowled at her and Aiden laughed. It felt so easy, so right to be there with them.

"Blueberries?" Nigel asked, kissing his temple before sliding from his arm and back to the stove.

"Um, yeah. Great." Aiden replied, dropping into the seat opposite Brie as she continued to grin at him so hard he was sure her face was aching.
Within a few minutes the three of them were at the table, Brie chattering happily about a school project she wanted Aiden to help with, which would be easier if he was going to be there all the time. Aiden found himself grinning as wide as she had been, even moreso when Nigel reached across the table and took his hand. The three of them sat there enjoying the family moment for most of the morning - pancakes served at intervals.

By late morning, Brie decided she'd had enough, the novelty having become less so at this point, and decided to go play in the garden. When she got down from the table she stopped to ask -

"Daddy... You know today is a school day, right?"

Nigel winced at the information and Aiden had to stifle a laugh and the urge to say - *whoops*. He was suddenly overwhelmed with the knowledge that being with Nigel, moving into the house, meant that he was also going to be a parent. That ground rules would need to be discussed and boundaries set. It wasn't like he was just the babysitter anymore.

And he was perfectly alright with that.

*

Given Brie's impromptu and accidental day off of school, they decided to take her to the park for the afternoon and then out for dinner. All things that Nigel and Brie had never even really done with Gabi. And he was pretty glad of that, that these memories would be theirs alone and never marred by something that had come before.

That was the only thought he spared for Gabi. She had held too much influence over his life for too long. Too much consideration had gone into her actions and informed his decision making way too much. He was never going to let that happen again.

By the time they returned to the house it was dark and Brie was so tired she could barely stay awake. She insisted Aiden take her up to bed and read her a bedtime story, which he clearly had no desire to refuse. That had made Nigel chuckle, and his heart swell. Could this really work out? It felt like it could, it really felt like he could have it all and there was something inherently terrifying about that. He didn't want to lose someone again, but he had to take the risk. For his own sake not just for Brie.

Nigel settled on the sofa and started to try and find a movie that he and Aiden could watch, or more likely make out in front of like teenagers. He was surprised by the knock at the door considering everyone likely to ever come to the house was already safely inside it.

When he opened the door to the pack alpha and his mate, Nigel's heart sank and his blood rose. He knew Aiden had said they knew about them, even had tried to matchmake them, but the idea that they might try to part them was something he still had lingering. At least enough to set him on his guard. He couldn't lose Aiden now and the fear - however unfounded it might be - that they would take him away roused primal emotions within him.

"Nigel." Lecter said by way of greeting, inclining his head slightly. Nigel didn't respond, merely waited for the alpha to continue. "Aiden's truck is on your drive. You should have called to inform us." The tone was unhappy and Nigel felt his whole body tense.

"You're not taking him." Nigel growled.

Lecter raised a brow but had no time to respond before Nigel's hands were on him, grabbing his jacket and pulling him close. He knew this was insane, that if he took on Lecter he took on the whole pack. But every instinct within him was screaming to hold onto Aiden, whatever the cost. After everything that had brought them to this point. Protect Brie, protect Aiden - his mate.

"You are not taking him." Nigel reiterated, snarling.

*

Aiden rushed down the stairs and straight into the foray.

"What the... Nigel?"

Nigel stepped back from Lecter, dropping his grip, but barred Aiden's way - protecting him by instinct it seemed.

"Aiden." Will's relief was clear and he stepped forward, but Nigel remained between them and let out a light snarl.

He laid a gentle hand on Nigel's arm and could feel the heat there. He was set to turn if the situation called for it. Aiden slid his hand down and into Nigel's gripping it lightly and giving

a squeeze.

"I'm staying with you Nigel." Aiden said quietly, though they could all hear it. Nigel let out a breath at that, his form relaxing a little even though he remained clearly alert.

Hannibal frowned. "We had no plans to remove you. We merely sought assurances that you were well. We hadn't heard-"

"Shit, I'm sorry." Aiden interjected. "I should have called or something."

Will was grinning as he turned to Hannibal and laid a hand lightly on the alpha's arm. "Hannibal, they've been busy."

Hannibal turned to Nigel. "The pack took you in because of your situation. Adult lone wolves don't always do well in packs and I was sure you would prove to be the acception to the rule, for Brie's sake." He clearly sensed Nigel's hackles rising again because he raised placating hands. "That is not to say that you haven't. As alpha it pleases me that you are willing to stand up to those greater than you to protect what is yours. I just need you to realise that what is yours is not just Brie... and Aiden." he added the last with a gentle smile. "It's the whole pack and you are welcome to stay with us for as long as you protect it with the same fervor. That is all I can ask of any pack wolf."

Nigel didn't respond immediately but his grasp of Aiden's hand tightened. Finally he said -

"I need to stay. For Brie. She... She doesn't know any other way. She needs a pack to help raise her. I need a pack to help raise her." Nigel admitted, the fight going from him.

"And the pack needs you Nigel. You are an asset to us and I would like you to remain so, I'd like to utilise you more. But I need to know you will always protect the pack."

Aiden spoke up before Nigel could respond. "This is why you wanted us together... to maximise the benefit to the pack." His words were filled with the coldness he felt at the manipulation.

Hannibal's expression softened to the adoration he had always had for Aiden. That a father might have for a son. "No, Aiden. I... I wanted you together because I could see how perfectly you fit. How well you suited - the wonderful things you would bring out in each other." Hannibal reached into his coat and brought out Aiden's battered sketchbook, handing it to him before continuing - "The completeness you would find. Any benefit to the pack is secondary. If you want to leave tomorrow, I would stop neither of you. You would go with our love and blessing. But I selfishly hope that you don't."

They all fell into silence, processing the information and thoughts and feelings that came with it.

"Aiden is staying here with me." Nigel finally responded, gruff to the point of almost growling.

Used to the posturing of others, Hannibal didn't react other than to give a slight nod. "Of course, if that is what Aiden wants."

"It is." Aiden found himself responding without thought.

"Aiden is staying here with us!" The small yet powerful voice of Brie Ibanescu silenced all the adults. She stood at the bottom of the stairs and had likely been there for sometime. Aiden felt a stab of concern and guilt that she might have been dragged into this.

Hannibal crouched down so he was of her height. "No one is going to make Aiden do anything he doesn't want to Brie." He smiled at her but she eyed him so warily it almost made Aiden laugh. A tiny lone wolf against the pack alpha.

She walked forward until she was next to Aiden, slipping her hand into his.

"He wants to stay here." She said firmly, all but stamping her foot.

"Yes he does." Hannibal smiled and stood, taking a step back. He let out a low huff of amusement. "All our lone wolves under one roof." His smile was warming and he turned it on Aiden with no little affection. Aiden returned it.

And then he was suddenly gone.

"Brie!" Both Aiden and Nigel shouted at once as the child slammed the door on the alpha and his mate.

"Oh my god!" Aiden erupted into fits of giggles.

"That was naughty baby." Nigel was clearly trying to suppress a laugh, which Aiden completely understood. If Hannibal had just been upfront with them from the beginning, life would have been a lot smoother.

"I didn't want him to change his mind and take Aiden." She grumped, not in the least bit remorseful.

"He won't take me baby." Aiden grinned, ruffling her hair. "You heard him, all the lone wolves under one roof. He knows this is where I belong."

She turned a dazzling smile on him. "We're not just lone wolves. We're a pack." She told him. "A pack of three. And we always protect the pack." She released Aiden's hand in favour of making a hand dusting gesture as though she had just taken out the trash.

She sauntered back to the stairs and started making her way back up to bed, leaving Aiden and Nigel to grin at each other in her wake.

"Sounds good to me." Aiden laughed as Nigel pulled him into his arms and a soft, loving kiss.

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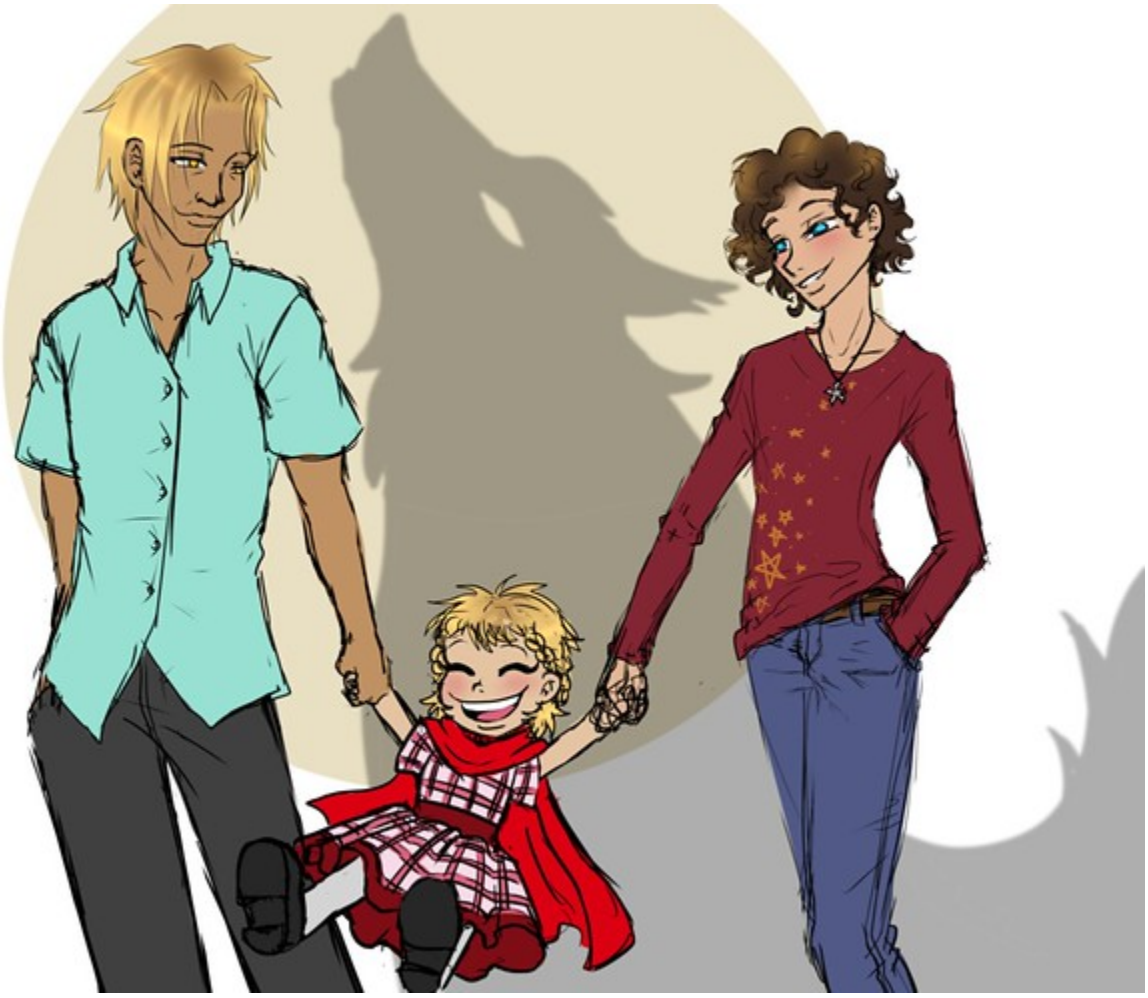

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